WORDEATER 97

read me.

WORDEATER - 97

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Country Mile
Jeff Adams

Cigarette flicked out
car window for fireworks
in rear-view mirror

Foot In Mouth
Jeff Adams

You torture me with your tight-lipped smile
Why don't you stop it and show people
The desolation those lips are enclosing
Your hand-holding, heart-felt sentiments
Are only ornate window dressing
For a cheap dime-store hood
That do-good, dim-witted karma you spread
Will soon run thin
And turn to technicolor arsenic

Lost 86
Jeff Adams

But doubt existence.
    For it sugarcoats the bloated pill
        Reality will try feeding you.
    Peel, poke, pulling
    You away from your dreams.
Sleep is just death on the installment plan.
        I say hey your not listening!
    Not listening to yourself.
    Respect the void.
    Infect the void.
        Sing your praises to the void
And I will dance
    With you into the daggers of this cold night.

Thirty Seconds Spent at a Red Light in Chicago
Jeff Adams

Why are you wearing that pink wind-breaker?
It's numbnuts cold and you look rather old.
To be out and about, without a care or a thought
Of the world that surrounds,
    or the woman you are.
Must be a great granny.
Could that be you, dog?
Marking its three-legged territory
    without a care or a word.
Did you remember your keys?
Did you lock the front door?

How My Community College Has Changed My Life
Linda Atkinson

The vacuum cleaner doesn't roll out like it used to. The laundry has been taken over by the remaining family members. Dinner more often then not is something that comes out of a box. Before we can sit down to eat it, the table has to be cleared of books and papers that have managed to spread completely over it. Murphy Brown, Frazier, and Janeway have been replaced by Stephen Crane, Horace Mann, and Toricelli, just to name a few. Phone conversations with friends turn to talk of business management techniques or debate over behavior management in the classroom, as well as where the best buy for chicken is on a given day. These, however, are only the most recent, obvious changes.

Throughout the years I have developed a pattern of taking courses, stopping, changing direction, and returning to Joliet Junior College. Not only does the school continue to add new classes,

but it continues to find innovative ways of teaching them. I have had the opportunity to learn everything from canning foods to cross-country skiing, reading an atlas to interpreting a poem. I have learned through independent study, video tapes, and classroom settings. I have gone to school daytime, night time, summertime, and weekends. I have taken classes on-campus and off-campus. Thus, if my community college can make the changes to afford its citizens every opportunity to change for the better, are we not obligated to do just that? As I change hats from mother to student, I am provided with a golden opportunity to walk my talk. When I tell my daughter to be the best student she can be, Joliet Junior College is giving me the opportunity to show her exactly what that means. So now, not only has my community college wrought change in me once again, it has also the potential to bring about a change in someone who has yet to pass through its doors.

Back in 1972, when I was a junior in high school, my community college allowed me the opportunity to participate in college credit courses. My parents loved it, as it kept me off the streets and out of trouble. Participation in these classes led to a boost of self-esteem and the opportunity to further explore subjects of interest. Mostly, though, it brought me in contact with a diverse group of positive adult role models. It was while taking these classes that I realized school is a lifelong endeavor. You are never too old to learn, never too old to change in attitude or direction, and even if life places obstacles in your path, Joliet Junior College will patiently await your return or help you find ways around them.

This essay won JJC's competition for the 1997 Paul Simon Essay Contest on the topic of How Is (or Has) Your Community College Helping You.

The Blind Man

Wayne Berscheid

The stench of dried beer floated to his nose as he lay very still in a pool of his vomit. Curiously, he could not see a thing, and each breath felt like it took an eternity to inhale. A strange tapping began growing louder. At first the sound seemed almost urgent and non-existent in nature, but as it grew louder, the sound was relaxed and he could tell that it was moving closer. The tapping ended and was followed by quick speech. The speaker had a deep southern accent and was informing someone that this one did not make it. Another voice then said, that it served him right for being drunk. The stench from the vomit and a wave of pain suddenly overtook him and he blacked out.

The next couple of moments, that he remembered, involved the sensation of being rolled slowly down some large echoing room. He still could not see, but the smell of vomit was gone. He assumed they were in a hospital, too bad for whomever was next to me, the man thought. What did that paramedic say? . . . Oh yeah, it served him right for being drunk. A dull mechanical sound filled the room as the bed he was on came to a halt. The man thought that it was strange that they would board an elevator. He tried to speak but nothing happened. The man thought that the paramedics must have given him something for the pain and this affected his throat. He put the thought out of his mind when he felt another surge of pain grip his body. He fought to remain conscious; however, the pain was too much.

A loud changing noise startled him awake. Damn, he thought, I still cannot see. He realized that he was lying down and in very small room. He could feel the slow exhale bounce off of the object in front of him. His thought went immediately to the loud clanging noise. Nobody is talking to me. Will somebody tell me what is going on? He realized that he was only screaming these question in his head. Another clanging noise and he felt his "bed" shift. He felt the whole room

change suddenly and he was thrust into another warmer room. The room was filled with several noises. A coffee pot dripping, the squeak of a shoe on the floor, the hushed whisper of a small child, and a quiet muffled cry. Maybe I am in the emergency room, he thought. A firm voice filled his ears. Is this your husband? Pause. Yes. The man was taken aback thinking–Man, that voice sounds so familiar, but . . . it could not be. Another sudden jerking movement of the "bed" and he was enveloped in silence. The sudden stopping of the bed hurtled another shot of excruciating pain. Blackness, silence.

A sickly smell wafted to his nostrils. The sound of squeaky machinery filled his ears. Strange forces pushed on either side of him. The pain was incredible, but the man fought to stay alert. The man thought that it must be dinner time, good I haven't eaten in a long time. The strange smell grew stronger and stronger. A stinging pain rose from his feet. The putrid smell of overcooked steak stung his nose. Damn I still cannot see. The pain was traveling slowly up his thighs. I must fight to stay conscious . . . I sure wish I knew where that nurse's call button was. The smell now became familiar to him . . . the smell of burning hair. Undeniably burnt and burning hair. The waves of pain were coming again. Pulling him deeper and deeper into the tide of unconsciousness. A sizzling noise found its way to his ears. He could not feel his feet anymore. As a final wave of pain pushed over his head, he realized where he was. The incinerator. No!!...Impossible!!!...I must get out. I cannot move. Panic gripped the man as he fought to stay conscious. Man, when I get out of this I am going to get at least five million for my story. Mental note, do not tell Barbara Walters that I was drinking. Then blackness, silence, solitude.

Cheeseburger in Paradise

Wayne Berscheid

Dark are the thoughts of Peace.
Strife and Confusion will release
without the dissonance of Conflict
Where are the fights to be picked?

Are the People very aware
of Dying, Lying, and Spying for fear
Confinement in which I believe
our souls know little reprieve.

Heaven and Hell are untrue,
Love and Hate never come due.
Forsaken with Comfort and Dismay
the chords of Peace never will play.

Colors

Wayne Berscheid

I. Blue

Frosted flakes, on my morning robe,
combining with lost, lilted, lint, balls.
Back glass sliding door, frosted over
velcro-ing my cat attached by the lobe.
Missing clouds, sky-menacing deepness
showing me the ass of space.
Reflecting linoleum blinds my cat
maybe a sign of my ultimate cheapness.

II. Yellow

Streaming view of the white fountain
pouring into unsettled pools.
Relaxing muscles and tools
Feeling it is good to be Wayne.

III. Red

(J-e-l-l-o)

Pulsating, quivering mass of gelatinous goo,
shaking violently ready to spew.
Cherry popped-innards congealed
the little girl squealed.

(J-e-l-l-o)

Counting Stars

Mary Bowden

Relaxing on the black, dirty roof,
hands behind my head
warming against soft hair
Chapped lips breathe in cool air
Gentle breeze tickles my stomach
As legs stretch out.
I gaze into the pitch black sea
That is sprinkled with glowing, radiant twinkles.
I watch forever, eyes feasting
As stars seem to sing to me.

The Light

Mary Bowden

I lie in my bed
Dark room glazed with light
Cracks around door shine

Peering in a Restaurant Window

Mary Bowden

A string quartet
Nicely-dressed people
dance and talk,
Sipping glasses of red wine.

Sailing

Mary Bowden

Small piece of paper
Traveling down the gutter
In the pool of rain

Snow Globe

Mary Bowden

Encircling the spherical realm
of powdery snow falling
Around a tiny village

Untitled

Mary Bowden

If gifted with a voice
I would sing like lilies
Covered with dewdrops
At the dawn of day.

Untitled

Mary Bowden

Sitting in sunlight
golden rays glow on green grass
Enveloping earth

A Conversation

Peter Buis

When night duties take their leave and the expected have come and timely gone, less ritual scenes (but those more at heart to life) take their setting. A fire at hearth picks up its objects of pained remembrance, bringing attention to matters not readily discussed. The flames peak and intrude interests, rub grains the wrong way, and recoil the mind from what should rather be forgotten. There is a reason why it is recessed in the brick wall, pushed down, back out of sight, although its ferocity is faintly quelled. Its colors still light the room; its heat still warms the air; its presence still stirs the mood.

Thick fumes from a 15th Century Italian patterned brandy hang above the sniffer which sits so gallantly (yet unaccustomed) between the fingers of a young man. Relaxed on the leather couch with his back more parallel to the floor than perpendicular, his vision has become nearsighted. His friend, and self-directed patron, sits more abreast to his right. Both face the fire with minds teeming with reserved thought needing to be expressed.

"Come? Where are we to go now?" the young man lets escape his mind as his stare remains fixed upon the brick mantle.

"Going? Are we going somewhere?" the friend says at first in a bit of confusion then turns to speak matter-of-factly. "There is nowhere to go. All is done. Everyone has left. They have all been set back on their course and are no better off than before."

Eyes still out of focus but with solemn intent, the young man's eyebrows raise in a tearing smile. "So where are we to go now?"

"Ah, I see. Who knows?"

A long pause ensues. The fire flickers in time with happier distortions of ill-fated remembrances until snapped by the need to outlive the situation.

"So what did they have to say when you brought out their carriage? I didn't have much chance to talk to them while they were here. -Well, they weren't offering up much for conversation themselves, now were they? But. . .?"

"Not much, not much. Well, you know what you've said. It seemed to them you had interest in a certain someone—"

"Nope."

"Yeah, I know. I just told them what you told me: that there was a thought, but that was all that there was."

The young man nods his head. Pained reflection stares into the windows of his soul. The fire flashes a jabbing light into his mind. With a final breath on the thought, he lets out a long sigh.

"The. . . eh . . . hmh." He pauses to collect the right words. "Is it . . . possible, to ever be content?"

His friend snickers and in a puff of air remarks "Why, do you ask such large questions?"

"Yeah . . . eh. Well? In this last year I haven't been at rest in one spot for more than two months at a time. I've been all across the country and have walked among hundreds of thousands of people —even managed to learn a few of their names. And you know, . . . I will never see any one of them ever again. The world is so phenomenally huge . . . its size is unfathomable!" Turning to a point: "Tell me, with so many people in the world, how is it possible to find the right person?"

Swallowing a last gulp of spirits the friend widens his eyes and shakes his head in response to the statement as the man continues.

"Am I to be caught in the Platonic ideal —that

there is one person for everyone, perfect, yet cruelly distanced by all space and time? But how can that be? For people are getting married everyday —to people who grew up just down the street from them, no less. How am I supposed to reconcile that? . . . What? —is it that there are multiple ideal persons, or is it that there are several almost, but not quite, suitable persons and that with some hiding of real desire and overcoming of apprehension people get married? Is it just that others are . . . do-able?" He fains to question: "Does that ideal 'need' to be filled?"

What harlotry that idea occurs in his mind. He goes over to the fire now that he is on his feet allowing to the course of accusations and presentiments which he has just burst forth.

"I've come to figure it like this," his friend now responds. "Whoever that person is that you marry becomes that ideal person. One is to fashion out of that person the ideal. Not that one changes the other. Standards, simply get re-structured not altered, just . . . well? —the person you marry transcends all the minute details of desired character in that hoped-to-be one person. You create in her that special person, via the institution of marriage."

The young man's mind is silenced. "That's a very, err . . . very interesting. I kind of like that. Wait, no . . .? There's too much hope in that. How can I be expected to see a light of hope in all this?"

His friend laughs and re-situates himself on the couch. The young man pokes the wood around the fire. Resting on his knees for some time, myriad images flash through his mind of thoughts had, words spoken, lines heard, and directions sought out. The young man rises to his feet and turns to face the dim fireglow of the room.

"I've heard it phrased before: Do you need somebody, or do you need me? I don't think anyone, err, I could ever say that or ever be able to answer that question. Too much hope, little possibility, lost in the tides of the maybe, perhaps, sometime it-might-be possible—"

"Well there, you say you have hope—"

"No. It's not enough to call hope."

"Well, I just say that because you just said—"

"Eh, what I said . . . " his face shakes off the notion.

"All is not so fading and demanding. Life provides the means to that end—"

"Life is a means to the end."

"Come now, you are too preoccupied being scrupulous?"

"To be looking with defined priorities?" His eyes flare up and then calm down to present humored reality with an awkward smile. "Hmm. Come, let us go over it again."

The young man resumes his forgone position upon the couch. His friend smirks and repositions himself to welcome his friend's presence now, beside him once more. The fire bellows on, scalding the andirons and marring the brick with black ash.

When night duties take their leave and the expected have come and timely gone....

Untitled

Jessica Canupp

i held
HATE
in my hands
last night
cupped between
my 5 digits
and one palm
it sat there
evilly SEETHING
dripping
sin
under my nails
planning
its next move
staring at

me
Waking me
out of my frozen
State.

Womb

Jessica Canupp

i slide into bed with my mom
in the safe warmth from her cushy body
touched by the serenity of the moment
her breath
my breath
resting together
finally feeling like mother and daughter
like 1978
inside of her
still caring about me
loving me
i slide closer to her
wanting to be back inside
eyes filled with dreams of me
the darkness the only thing i see
floating on a cloud of black
the only thing in the room is
    the space between us
and i stroke her coarse hair
resting my head in the crook
    of her neck and shoulder
forgiving her
forgiving me
wishing to know she still loves me
with my insecurities
like before
and i kiss her softly on the cheek
and fall asleep
safe.

I Can't Dance

Wayne Ceranek

I don't know why. But it's . . . I can't. I can't make my body move in these ways that the music is demanding that I move. It's just so goddamn embarrassing. The situation. Standing in public around hundreds of people who are displaying their purist, truest selves. It takes them no more than two drinks and their souls are out there on the dance floor. Their goodness, their sensuality. They're sharing and loving. I watch that, look at that. But my body fights it. I start to analyze the muscles. The rhythm. The signature. I understand the theory of dancing. The idea of spontaneously sharing in this moment that exists now and only now. The give and take with your partner. Two mirrors on a land where gravity holds you to this point and then leaves you free. And that the universe happens right there and then. Like truth. I understand this intellectually. But I have never experienced it. I can't dance.

When we were together, there were all these times when you would arrange for us to be in these places. These parties, and there would be a band, or music playing, and people would start dancing. And invariably you would want to dance. And I wouldn't dance with you. And I would see the hurt register on your face. I would see the anger build within you. I could see that not dancing, just wouldn't do for you.

And I didn't just say "I can't dance." I didn't just tell you. Because it was the dam holding the water. If I let that out, that one thing, everything would follow. I couldn't dance. I couldn't have a normal conversation about the weather with a neighbor without getting into a conversation about God, love, and eternity. After all, the weather has these huge connections. I couldn't act correctly in social situations. I couldn't sacrifice truth for a relationship. I couldn't hold you when you needed to be held because I wanted you to be stronger. Because I wanted to be stronger. I couldn't ask you for the warmth of your touch out of need. I

couldn't let myself. I would only ask for your touch out of strength. Out of something that wouldn't become sick and interdependent and symbolic. I wasn't able to do these things.

I don't know. Your leaving didn't really say anything to me. It was just something in this continuum. This cycle. It was just this thing that happened in my life. The love of my life was with another man. It didn't seem permanent. But now . . . now the fact that this angel, this unbelievable gift isn't mine. And will never be mine. This is killing me.

I'm twenty-eight years old. I have done nothing but make myself more isolated, unavailable, and unappealing. Believe it or not, it's difficult picking up women with this type of conversation. I don't make much money. I never earned a college degree. I can't bring myself to work for someone who is not producing some kind of goodness. That rules out ninety-eight percent of job openings. And the other two percent pay approximately five dollars an hour.

I'm not going to change. I don't know why. People think I make these choices, but I don't. You've got to believe me; I have no control.

I can't dance.

Purist's 'Plaintion Bram Stoker's Dracula

Wayne Ceranek

Mina Harker, bow your head
Not because poor Lucy's dead
Nor because the evil Count
Drew your blood in some amount
Rather redirect your grief
Where no tears can grant relief
Know in one brief, sorrowful look
That Bram Stoker's finest book
Never once was clearly seen
By the writer for the silver screen.

Does it pain you in the belly
When they mess up Mary Shelly?

The Ratcheting of the Fearful

Wayne Ceranek

I'm a writer
I went utterly mad three months ago
There's no other answer
All I can hear
Is the hissing of eye-cups
And the ratcheting
Of the fearful
And all my friends
And lovers
Ripping
And for three days
There's been no light in this house
Save the small dawns
Of my constant cigarettes
I must be mad
And, oh God
I wish I could die from it

A Season Into Night

Wayne Ceranek

Always before I could explain
The turning darkness of the earth

And how the dark embraced the rain
To give the ferns and flowers birth

Already I forget those things
And how a vein of gold survives
The mining of a thousand springs
The seasons of a thousand lives

Now winter is my memory
Now autumn, now the summer light
So every spring from now will be
Another season into night

Zoological Love

Wayne Ceranek

I wonder if she knows that
She bites her lower lip when she's thinking
It's so adorable
Ice blue eyes melt my heart
As she stares into nothingness
Why do I get the feeling
I'll never mean even as much
As a flagellum under a microscope

Windows of the Soul

Dee

Your eyes are the windows of the soul.
Your skin repents a story that you never told.
Your mind operates in its own mode.
Your body walks to its own beat.
Your facial expression reflects
your personal defeats.
Your smile shows how happy you used to be.
Please tell me why your life's gotta be.
Why can't you walk to a sweeter beat?

Untitled

Leah Errichetto

Distorted memories
Visions of being happy.
On the sun
I come undone.

It's empty inside of me
I am so melancholy.
Everything I see
reminds me of you.

You're dancing in my head
I wish you could be dead.
Maybe you'll disappear
When the spiders come around.

You took away this soul
You like to take control.
In the rain
You look so vain.

It's morning. Sun's in my face.
It's better than being replaced.
But I know you'll be gone
When the spiders come around.

The spiders are coming to town.

School Day
(A Closet Drama)

Colleen Fitzpatrick

Characters:
Stevie; teenage boy with Muscular Dystrophy.
Milly; Stevie's grandmother and caretaker.
Wally; Stevie's grandfather.

Scene
Teenage boy is strapped into a hospital bed sleeping. The boy smiles and slowly turns his head to the right. [Dim light, right stage.] We see a young mans silhouette dancing dramatically and gracefully. Then we hear an alarm clock. Silhouette is gone, as is the sleeping boys smile.

Milly: (Hear door open. Enter grandma Milly.) Good morning, Stevie, (snaps window shade up.) School day today. Are you awake? (Stevie lies motionless.) Stevie, wake up! (Milly claps her hands loudly above Stevie's bed then bends down next to his face.) I'm not playing this game today. Open you eyes, boy, or I'll call for your grandfather. (Stevie opens his eyes. Grandma sighs, relieved.) How do you feel, sweetie?

Stevie: Okay, I guess. I really don't feel like going to school today. My back hurts.

Milly: (Looking through a dresser for an outfit for Stevie.) Perhaps it is the way you slept?

Stevie: (He looks annoyed and frustrated.) Grandma, I sleep the same way every night, every night for fifteen years. I don't think that's the problem. It's the bad kind of pain, grandma.

Milly: (Turns from dresser.) Okay, Stevie, I'll get your medication.

(Milly walks to desk, unlocks it, and emerges with medicine tray. She sets tray down on dresser and starts to rummage through the twenty some prescription bottles.)

Stevie: (Turning to look out window.) Grandma, do you think all kids with Muscular Dystrophy walk in their dreams?

Milly: (Finds bottle she is looking for and turns to Stevie.) I suppose so; people can do what-ever they want to do in their dreams. Do you walk, Stevie?

Stevie: (Turns toward Milly smiling.) I dance in mine.

Milly: That must be why you enjoy sleeping so much. (Milly pushes a button on Stevie's bed to raise him to a sitting position. We hear bones crack deeply. Stevie has a look of fright on his face. Milly takes two pain killers out of the prescription bottle and pours a glass of water from the nearly empty pitcher sitting on the nightstand.) Here, take these. (Milly puts the capsules in his mouth and brings the glass of water to his lips so he may drink.) That enough water for you to get those down?

Stevie: Another glass would be nice. But I really don't like the bathroom water; can I have a glass from the kitchen?

Milly: Okay, sweetheart. (Yelling out into hall.) Wally, I need you to come keep Stevie company while I get him some water.

(Wally enters drinking from a coffee mug.)

Wally: Hey there, kiddo. How was your night?

Stevie: Not bad.

(Milly smiles at them and leaves the room.)

Stevie: It's just fine with me, but that is the only way for us guys to be left alone.

Wally: (Gives a light playful "slug" to Stevie's arm.) That-a-boy, us guys need time to ourselves. (Wally looks at Stevie concerned.) How are you feeling? You look a little pale.

Stevie: Well, I gotta headache, grandpa. Think you can give me some aspirin?

Wally: Well, (pauses) sure Stevie. Grandma doesn't like me messing with your medication, but I suppose aspirin couldn't do any harm. (Wally picks up bottle and opens it.) How many, Stevie? I know your tolerance is pretty high. How 'bout four; will that do the trick?

Stevie: (Smiles.) Sure grandpa, that should definitely do the trick.

Wally: (Walks to the bed with tablets and bottle in hand. Wally sets the bottle down on the nightstand.) How 'bout washing them down with

some coffee?

Stevie: (Smiles in agreement. Wally gives him the pills and coffee.) Grandpa, have you accomplished many of the dreams you had as a boy?

Wally: (Taken aback.) Well, I suppose I accomplished enough to be happy. I didn't accomplish them all, but I guess there will be plenty of time for that in another life to come.

Stevie: (Looking away from grandpa and out window.) I haven't been able to accomplish much of mine. I can't wait for my other live-times to come.

Wally: (Walks closer to Stevie's bed and kneels beside it.) Stevie, I know how you must feel. (Stevie gives an annoyed chuckle.) But listen, in my day, young boys in your condition only dreamed of going to school. And here you are fulfilling those dreams for them.

Stevie: But grandpa, I don't want to go to school. (Sound of footsteps.)

(Wally straightens out and sips his coffee.)

Wally: We'll talk about this later, you know how this kind of talk upsets your grandmother.

(Enter Milly with Stevie's wheelchair and water.)

Milly: What are you two up too?

Wally: Who us? We were whooping it up before you came crashing the party.

Milly: (Looks at clock.) Yeah, I usually find you partying it up when breakfast needs to be cooked. It's getting late; Stevie may miss his bus.

Wally: (Salutes Milly and walks toward the door.) I didn't realize it was so late; call me if you need anything.

(Exit Wally.)

Milly: (Pouring more water for Stevie.) Is your back feeling better?

Stevie: No, it feels worse, grandma. I really don't feel like going to school. Please let me stay home!

Milly: (Annoyed.) Stevie, you know you can't stay home. You've already missed your four days allowed this semester; if you miss another without a doctor excuse, you'll be suspended.

Stevie: Well, call the doctor and ask him for an excuse.

Milly: (Starting to dress Stevie.) You know that won't work. You do look a little pale, is your back still hurting that much or are you just worried about your science test?

Stevie: Both.

Milly: Well, I guess if those pain killers haven't worked yet, you may have a higher tolerance that I thought for them. (Milly takes out three more pain killers and gives them to Stevie.) But remember you can't take these with aspirin. When the nurse from school told me you asking for aspirin, all day yesterday, I was surprised to hear you had forgotten such an important thing. Grandpa said you must of had a death wish that day. (Milly checks clock and calls for Wally.) It's late, Wally, let's get Stevie in his chair. (Milly proceeds to dress Stevie, he has become extremely limp.) I gave you those pain killers too soon; it looks like the other are starting to work. Are you feeling better?

Stevie: I suppose so. (Milly continues to dress him.) I still don't want to go to school. My body is tired.

Milly: (Sighing.) Honey, you have no choice. Just because you're crippled doesn't mean you have any special rights. You, like every other teenager, must go to school. (Milly looks at clock.) I'll be back, I'm getting your grandfather; we've got to get this show on the road.

(Milly exits.)

Stevie: (To himself.) Yes, on the road. (Stevie closes his eyes. [Lights dim] Silhouette of dancer reappears dancing dramatically and gracefully.)

(Milly and Wally enter. Dancer leaves.)

Milly: Wake up, Stevie. (Milly claps her hands above his bed.) Stevie, we don't have time for this! Wake up!

Wally: (Concerned.) Maybe he should stay home.

Milly: (Agitated.) No, he knows damn well he has to go to school. I told him earlier this morning I wasn't playing his game. (Turning back to Stevie.) Stevie, your gonna miss the bus. (Milly

turns on the light on the nightstand. She notices the aspirin bottle; she picks it up, holds it tight to her chest, and looks down to Stevie.) Wally, (calmly) did Stevie ask for aspirin?

Wally: (Still concerned.) Well, he said he needed them for his headache; I gave him four. Why? What's happening?

Milly: (To herself.) He knew better. (Turning to Wally.) Call an ambulance and wait outside so they get the right house. Wave the school bus on while you're out there.

(Exit Wally.)

Milly: (Turns to Stevie.) Why couldn't I just let you stay home, Stevie. (Pacing.) Damn those self-righteous groups in Washington. They fought for your right to go to school, Stevie. They emphasized "NO SPECIAL TREATMENT" and said "ignore those handicap." As long as the bathrooms are big enough, no need to worry. You never got to use those bathrooms they built for you, did you Stevie? No, you used a portable urine bottle and thank God for colostomy bags. (Kneeling next to the bed.) They claimed they voted for what was best for you, they voted to make you seem as normal as possible. I voted with them. (Takes hold of Stevie's hand.) Stevie, I'm just as guilty as them; I wanted you to fit into your school and do things the other kids were doing. I wanted you to be normal, and I lost sight of what you were actually going through. I forgot about the cancer eating away at your body. (Hear faint sirens.) Good-bye, Stevie. (kisses head.) Sleep tight.

[Lights dim; full figure of dancer is dancing on stage.]

Album Box

Erica Gallagher

As out of control as the pen in my hand
Is this love, my love, you can not understand
As pure as the first summer ever known
And as sad as the love I've never known
Do you understand a thing that I am telling?
Would you rather I be screaming and yelling?
The one thing I can't afford to lose
Is the one thing I cannot choose
When I bring myself to your heart
Try not to tear it apart
Because you always have the right to take
The bigger slice of my cake.

And So I Kill Thee

Erica Gallagher

And so I kill thee
While you drip wet at the black lake
As you die, you look up at me
And just what does a man see
Before his bones break?

And so I kiss thy master
Just before I shed the blood
I know how to end it faster
You must dread disaster
Shall I lay you to rest in the mud?

Why do you weep and
    put this moment to waste?
Haven't you cost me enough already?
Oh, the sweet tears I will taste!
Oh, the pain I have erased!
Now, love, hold your head steady.

Make this easy on my heart, dear
Help me wash away the guilt, lover
All of this mounting sorrow and fear
Has me wish you were still here
As your face I kiss and your body I cover.

Don't Point That Gun at Me
Erica Gallagher

When I had you where I wanted you
I just set you free
Now that you can end my life
Don't point that gun at me.

Don't pretend it's unloaded
Shooting blanks into the sky
When I beg you for forgiveness
Don't aim and let me die.

Don't point that gun at me
Because it's not the thing to do
I am just a mirror
Reflecting a picture of you.

When I had your life in my hands
I led you to sunshine
Do you not have a great life now
Why, may I ask do you want mine?

There's nothing left now
Nothing to help make you see
That the last thing you should do
Is shoot that gun at me.

Home
Erica Gallagher

I am not all "warm and fuzzy"
Like I've heard it is nice to be
If you've ever felt "black and sick"
Then you know what it's like to be me.

I ain't ever coming home
I won't let my feet touch that ground
They are more happy and I am less sad
When I ain't hanging around.

I am not all "soft and cuddly"
Like I've heard good women are
If you have ever felt "cold and hard"
Than you're not off to far

I ain't ever coming back
Because that would mean the death
I ain't ever coming home
It's just a big waste of breath.

I Am Not
Erica Gallagher

I am not your passion
I am not your goal
I am not the lover
You love with your soul.

I am not your companion
Should you want a friend
I will leave you in trouble
That has no happy end.

I am not the pain
You deserve to feel
In the arms of the cruel
And in the spokes of evil's wheel

If you found it in me
You've been in denial.
Where did you see happiness?
In an actor's sweet smile?

Are you so understanding
That you'd let it slide?

Are you so full of sorrow
That you'd keep it inside?

For if you wanted comfort
Would you want it to be
Offered from the broken form
That is me.

Layne

Erica Gallagher

He was sitting up in that attic again
Things between us all but clicked goddamn it.
If ever there were a shady spot in his heart
Then I'm not afraid to say I am it.

I am counting the days "til I can see him
Love is a pitchfork in my heart of all places.
I could pull myself off of his melted skin
If I could break out of these braces.

You are the insane little spark of electricity,
    Layne
You are a stolen wallet and
    you have all but won.
I will steal you back and trust me
That's just what I should've done.

He was smoking down in the basement
I hope he's thinking about remembering
    the forgotten.
If not, I hope he burns a hole through his heart
Which itself is so dead and rotten.

Layne, listen you blond magic man of mine
Time has come that you go and burn.
I smile while you're tearing apart
And the world awaits your sweet return.

Mirror Falling Off the Wall

Erica Gallagher

The most memorable tears
Are the tears left unshed
As you hold them inside
And cover your breaking head.

The most memorable words
Are those left unsaid
So no one can quote your ignorance
When you're cold and dead.

The powerless condition of sexuality
Is a condition we can't help but forget
There's no cost more expensive
Than the price of regret.

My most memorable emotion
Was of love, and I ignored it
But I don't want that emotion
Unless I can afford it.

Money

Erica Gallagher

The scent of money- musty, old
The sight of its worn ends
The objects its traded for- angelic, perfect
The broken hearts it mends.

Oh money, you escape me, what for?
You make yourself such a stranger
You're always welcome in my hands
Maybe that's the hidden danger.

The feel of money, slipping in and out
Coming and going like the sun, only quicker

Sometimes never coming back to visit
I could steal you if I was slicker.

But everyone wants you and that's not fair
You're more sought after than any living thing
If I could be you for one day
Imagine the admirers I'd bring.

You are perfect and pure in nature
Even if you're ripped, torn or curled
You are wanted and loved and desired
By everyone in the world.

My Hang-ups
Erica Gallagher

I was blasted
Everything came out from under me
Nothing was even close to how it used to be
Why does it have to be this way?
I want to breathe.
I want to touch whatever's out there
But nothing comes close enough to touch
Am I not asking for the right things
Or am I asking for too much?
I am alone
Too alone for any company
No one understands the pain of my isolation
A big black sheet of emptiness
I must escape.

Relativity 96
Erica Gallagher

A hand inside a pocket
Or a hand inside a hand
My eyes are all over yours
And my eyes are full of sand.

A mouth duct-taped shut
Or two moths connected
My hands can't move because they're cuffed
My hands have been rejected.

A mind wants to be high
Minds can speak with one another
I gave two options
You took the other, you took the other.

A heart, what a silly thing
Love- an unknown concept
I had so much to hide from you
And you'll never find where it's kept.

Sex Overruled
Erica Gallagher

When he said, "It's me"
And showed me his pretty teeth
I know he lied
But at least he tried.
I won't put up a fight
I know you're right
"I need this," I said
I'd rather be wrong once
Than never have you in my bed.

Well the morning bell struck
I was out of luck
He was nowhere to be found
I drove all around
He was damn near gone
That was the conclusion I had drawn
"Probably dead"
I sadly said
I'd rather be right once
Than ever again be in his bed.

Young Man of Gold

Erica Gallagher

Ruined all your creative ideas
you've been collecting
I am not the lover you've been respecting
Rather the orphan you've been neglecting
But I'll keep on pushing until I find out
When you're least expecting
What this whole mess is about
And even then I'll still doubt
That you're worth protecting
So I'll blow your cover
As you go through your little selfish bout
With your imperfection as a lover
Because you're always thinking of her
And that's sad to even believe
When it's obvious that I am above her
Yet you haven't the strength to leave
You'd rather fumble and grieve
Because your weakness is a terrible vice
That you can't kick or retrieve
No matter how bad you wish to relieve
Your debts at any price
As if money was never an issue
Lord, it must be really nice
To live just one day as you
The pleasure to be one of the lucky few
Someone who can be so cheap, yet cost
So much that even love lost
Means nothing and is nothing to
Someone whose fields never frost.

My Dear Friend

Kimberly Garrett

It's a hell of a situation I'm in
I'm not sure but I think I'm in love
with my friend,
I talk to him all of the time
If asked, I would give him my last dime,
Just looking at him makes me smile every time
Sometimes I can't help but wish he were mine,
It really wouldn't matter to me
if he had a girlfriend
People come and go. I'll be there in the end,
Absolutely nothing has ever
happened between us
But once in a while I wish there was an us,
I could never see myself going to his house
As more than a friend-if I did I'd have
to listen to their mouths,
All I know is that when we are together
Things just couldn't be better,
He never does or says anything disrespectful
Sometimes I secretly think of how it would be
If we eventually had our own little family,
If I ever found some girl treating him like shit
I'd whip her up good! And dare her
to give me lip!
In a few months my dear friend will be gone
I can just see myself now listening
to those sad songs,
I don't know why I wish there was an us
There's no way he'd ever be attracted to me
God, I hope he never finds out

What I secretly thought,
I know I must stop it
I just can't help it,
As for a mate-he has his selection
I wish he'd pick me-I see him as perfection,
When he leaves I'll keep in touch
Writing him letters basically saying
    'miss you much!!!!'
'Nobody is perfect'-is what is said by most
I think I've found it-if not damn close!
It's not only his looks it's everything about him,
Everything that's great is everything about him,
Sometimes I think if I hang in there for a while
He'll look at me suddenly realize and smile,
Think to himself-son of a gun!!
This is the one!!!
But until then
I don't know where we're going
    I only know where we've been.

Untitled

Kimberly Garrett

You said you'd kill anyone that ever hurt me
The one I least expected was the one
    that got me,
This is absurd
There are no suitable words,
To even begin to describe the pain inside,
It's just that the tears are getting harder to hide
I can kind of control it during the day
Most thoughts of you I can just chase away,
But at night when my eyes are shut tight
Dreams of you are so strong - I lose the fight,
Going to bed I look forward to -
    because in my dreams I see you
At night I turn off the light.

The Future

Lola Gish

The future hurts
The sun blinds its way
Into your crossed arms
The blood squirts
The Lord harms
The future hurts.

The future stains
The snow melts
Under your fiery heart
The hate remains
As you tear apart
The future stains.

The future is dead
The mirror breaks
Into millions of pieces
You hold your head
As pain ceases
The future is dead.

The future hurts
The tunnel gets longer
Until you must rest
The temptation flirts
Get it off your chest
Because the future hurts.

Glenn I

Lola Gish

January landscape
White like a fairy
He lives in a cave
In an American cemetery.

Black like midnight
His hair falls at his shoulders
He leads the company
Of Satan's lost soldiers.

In the calm of night
I can hear him moan
Cutting through feet of fog
I know he's not alone.

He's sacrificing virgins
He's seducing vixens and temptresses
Claiming he's godly
But it's the devil he impresses.

Worshipping a black king
Using rituals so old and superstitious
You are the remains of alienated youth
You are vagrant, evil, and vicious.

Good night, sweet prince
Good bye and farewell
If it's the life of darkness you desire
Have fun living in hell.

GREAT lies

Lola Gish

Man can't live on love alone
He needs blood and flesh and bone
He needs earth and rain and fire
And another forbidden desire
And rules not written in stone.

Man can't survive on water and bread
He needs substance and indulgence instead
If he tries to survive without these
He will be praying on his knees
When he finds himself close to dead.

I Am . . .

Lola Gish

I'm the needle in the haystack
I'm the man buried in black
I'm the crud you kick
But I'm coming back!

This is the bad situation
This is the dreaded confrontation
But this is what you get
This is your congratulation.

I was the letters you erased
I was the love you misplaced
I can be the explosion
You have never faced.

I am happy to have met you
But I learned to forget you
Try to kill me why don't you
What makes you think I'll let you?

I am the nothingness around you
When ill fate has found you
If you step in my lake
I will delightfully drown you.

Not To Be Mistaken For Something Valid

Lola Gish

i am a cloud
not all precipitation and fog
the ones the cartoon characters bounce on
big fluffy white pillows of air and feathers

that is me

pass me down that pipe
this is how we communicate
we talk in uneducated sentence fragments
we giggle about nothing
    as we squint through the haze

this is us

Leave me alone
that's how i feel when he calls or comes by
to say "hello", even if it's all
    in innocent friendship
i'd rather he just packed up his crap and left

and that
is him.

Poem of the Dead

Lola Gish

Every breath is the choice you've made
Death be not dark, death be not afraid
If you believe in the power of Jehovah
Then He is your sun and you are His nova
I am spirit and soul, but no body
I am a dove flying to God
You visit my grave-site rather often
I am not rotten inside of my coffin
Don't bury me away in your memory
I won't forget you, will you forget me?
You kneel before me, for hours and hours
You write me poems and bring me flowers
But your flowers always seem to wilt
My death was a happy time, so why can't it be
Celebrated by more people than me?
Yes, I have been a prisoner of fragile mortality
A refugee of the worlds reality
But remember my spirit will never fade
Death be not dark, death be not afraid.

Questioningly

Lola Gish

I ask you for the millionth time
What is love
Where's it from?
Who holds love
Will he ever come?

I ask you in envy and misery
Why her, not me?
Why apart, not one?
Why sadness instead of joy
Why lost, never won?

Untitled

Doug Hawksworth

I fell asleep once,
and I did not awaken for months.
When I finally woke,
I found myself in a familiar place.
It appeared to be where my waking had ended.

I looked around, and saw that
things were as unsettled as before.
So I closed my eyes and returned to my dreams.
Where hearts are always true, and spiteless.
Where words are always spoken,
and deeds done.
And where I am who I forever strive to be.

I am forced to wake often, but each time . . .
I make more of my waking, my dreams.

A Mirror

Mary Head

Your eyes tell me a story
That no one else could know.
The way they look so sad at times,
And then at times they glow.
Your eyes tell me a story,
That words could not explain.
But I understand your secret,
I can feel your pain.
Your eyes tell me a story,
That breaks my heart within.
All the mixed emotions,
You remind me of me, my friend.

The Turmoil Within

Mary Head

Connie checked the map again, even though she had checked it before leaving the house. She wondered how many times she had been to O'Hare in the past eight years. She sighed heavily and told herself that it was okay, she'd get there.

She used to be such a confident person. Where did all the confidence go? It used to never bother her to go somewhere new, somewhere she had never been before. Hell, she flew to Clearwater Beach for a long weekend just last April, all by herself. The only thing she had was a hotel reservation. Without a second of hesitation she had gotten off the plane, retrieved her luggage, and promptly proceeded to the rent-a-car station. She hadn't a clue where her hotel was, but she had lived in Florida all her life. She even ventured to other towns on her trip, driving up and down the coast. She walked for hours up and down the beach alone, even fell asleep without a care in the world. Looking at her now, that seemed like a lifetime ago. But she was running then. Running away from problems she didn't know how to face.

Connie finally made her way to a parking place at the airport. She had only made one wrong turn along the way, and that was going into the main parking deck at the airport. She had to circle around the entire place again to correct her mistake. Getting out of the car she made a mental note of what section and aisle she parked in. As she waited for the elevator to take her down to the terminal she rummaged through her purse, found a pen, and jotted the car's location on a scrap piece of paper. The way she had been lately left her no reason to believe that just looking at the section and aisle number would ensure she would remember where the car was parked.

It was now 11:15 a.m. and Russ' flight wasn't due in until 12:20. While making her way through the terminal she stopped twice to check the arrival boards so she would know what gate Russ would be disembarking. One look was not enough to convince her C3 was the place she needed to go. After looking at the arrival board the second time she slowly shook her head. How could she not even trust what her own eyes had seen just minutes before?

She carefully placed her purse on the conveyor belt of the X-ray machine and hurried through the metal detector. When the alarm sounded she stood stunned for a minute. She sheepishly pulled her car keys out of her jacket, placed them in the tray, and went back through the metal detector again. She retrieved her keys and purse and proceeded at a swift pace towards gate C3.

Finding a seat facing the gate she plopped down only to stand up again to take off her jacket. She sat back down, closed her eyes, and took a deep breath.

"See Connie, you're here safe and sound, in plenty of time to greet Russ as he gets off the plane." Shaking off her anxiety she glanced again at her watch. It was now 11:55. The flight she was waiting for wasn't due in for another twenty-five minutes. Not to mention the fact that the people were coming out of gate C1, not C3.

Feeling self conscious she looked around to see if anyone noticed the panicked look that had to be apparent on her face. No one seemed to be paying any attention to her so she opened the magazine she had tucked away in her jacket and began skimming the pages. After a few minutes of flipping through the pages, not really aware of what was on them, she began to glance around again. A plane was pulling into a gate right by her. What the hell was that plane doing there? She stared at the luggage that was being unloaded, half expecting to see Russ' golf bag being pulled off the plane. She didn't see it and wondered if he had missed the plane. Then her mind shifted gears and she wondered how this plane was going to unload all the passengers and luggage and take off again in fifteen minutes. Had they changed the gate number of his flight?

She jumped up and went to check the arrival board. It wasn't until she was in front of the board that she noticed the passengers getting off the plane were filing out of gate C2.

She mumbled to herself, "God Connie, get a grip on yourself." Shaking her head she returned to her seat. She began leafing through her magazine again, but her mind was concentrating on other things. It worried her that she had been second guessing herself a lot lately. The past year had been a tough one. On the brink of divorce, the trip to Florida hadn't solved anything, she had finally given in and gone to see a psychiatrist. From May until August she had had no energy to deal with life. She cried a lot, and when she wasn't crying she was numb. She hated her life. Going to work was a major chore, but cooking dinner was even worse that going to work. The one thing that kept her going, the highlight in her life, were her two kids. She tried very hard not to let them see her upset. But she couldn't go on hiding her discontent forever. The doctor had decided she was depressed and should take medication. She did that for a year.

Going on antidepressants had been a hard thing to do. Connie always prided herself on her strength. She felt she should be able to cure herself. But that just wasn't working. The medication did help, but it was a slow climb back to normalcy. She continued seeing the doctor once a month for a year.

At the end of one year the doctor said she was ready to stop taking the pills. He said he was confident she could handle life without them. She, however, wasn't convinced she could. Maybe that was her downfall. She kept waiting to have a relapse. But for a few months there, she had been tough. Sure of herself and the way she felt. She handled the world with the confidence she once had. But what was happening now?

She recalled reading about people who were stuck in their homes, afraid to come out and face the world. She always thought that was ridiculous, but now she wondered if they had started out like her; panic stricken every time they went somewhere. She closed the magazine and tried to put the thought out of her head.

Russ had gone to Arizona for a long weekend golfing trip with one of his friends. He had called three times since he had been gone, but still Connie felt lonely. She was thrilled to have the kids to herself and decided to treat them to some fun.

Her friend Jeni had called her on Saturday and asked if she and the kids wanted to go out for pizza with the three of them, Jeni and her two kids. Connie had enthusiastically said yes, happy to get out of the house. But as they pulled to Pizza Hut that panicky feeling had begun to creep up on her. It was very crowded. They had to wait to be seated. The minute they sat down the kids wanted to go play in the play area until the pizza arrived. It had taken all her strength to let them go. She kept looking over her shoulder every few minutes to make sure she could see them and know they were safe. It hadn't seemed like such a significant thing at the time, but looking back on it she began to worry. Was this the beginning of some sort of nervous breakdown?

No one in her family had ever had mental problems before. Or, at least, been to a doctor for such a thing. Although, she was pretty sure her mother probably should have gone to one a long time ago.

She glanced again at her watch. It was 12:15. Good, only five minutes to go and Russ would be home. He would take care of her. Hopefully he would volunteer to drive home. She wasn't looking forward to fighting the traffic. Maybe she would call the doctor when she got home and make an appointment to see him. She wanted the panic attacks to stop.

After another few minutes of staring off into space, gate C3 opened. She could feel herself start to cry, but held back the tears, because, after all, what would all the other people think? They would think she had lost her mind.

Time seemed to stand still until Russ walked off the plane. When he did finally make his way through the gate, her heart was pounding so hard she was sure her whole body was shaking from the vibration.

She hugged him tightly, not wanting to let go, but his friend was now standing next to them looking somewhat confused.

"I'm really glad you're home," she said, searching his eyes for support.

"It's great to be home," he said light heartedly, oblivious to her plight.

She closed her eyes, let go of him, and decided she would definitely call the doctor tomorrow. She was frustrated but didn't blame him.

Even though Russ didn't seem to understand what Connie had just been through he held her hand as they all made their way down to the baggage claim area. She could feel her confidence building, but was unsure whether it was his presence that aided her, or the fact that she hated to admit to anyone else, especially Russ, that she didn't feel like she had control over her thoughts and actions.

"How was your flight?" she asked, trying to make casual conversation.

Russ and Dave took turns describing details of their flight, their golf games, the courses they visited, and their other various adventures in Arizona. They had played thirty four holes of golf the day before and Russ was complaining about his sore muscles.

"Oh, you poor baby," she exclaimed in sarcastic sympathy. It was nice to have a distraction to help keep her mind off her apparent inability to cope with life at the moment. The small talk continued, about the difference in temperature, the lavish house where they stayed, the people they were teamed up with to play their rounds of golf, and so on.

As they stepped up to retrieve their luggage Connie quickly checked the location of the car on the scrap piece of paper. She said the location once again to herself and shoved the paper back into her purse. She didn't want Russ or Dave to know she was unsure where the car was parked. In some strange way that would be admitting defeat.

The boys had their luggage and the three of them began to walk toward the parking lot. They got on an elevator and without a moments hesitation Connie pressed the button for level four, the Blackhawk level. As the elevator reached the fourth level and the doors began to open she had a moment of panic. Which way were they supposed to go now. But she trudged ahead and somehow ended up right beside the car. As Russ and Dave put their

bags in the trunk she turned to Russ and asked if he wanted to drive. But before the full sentence had even escaped her lips she knew what the answer would be.

Climbing into the drivers seat she took a deep breath as the others made their way into their seats. It was very dark in the garage and she couldn't see a thing. As she backed out she asked, "Where is the exit?"

Russ was the first to respond. He pointed her in the right direction, somewhat annoyed. Russ was the kind of person that always knew where he was, even if he wasn't driving. Connie had never mastered that skill, never really even thought about it before they had gotten married. If she wasn't driving she didn't really pay attention to the roads, she was just along for the ride. That was the last question today, however, that she would ask. She followed the signs that brought them back onto the tollway. She was determined to take them home without a wrong turn.

The ride home seemed to last forever. Dave sat in the back seat, his mind already back at the office, hard at work trying to make up for the two days he had taken off for this trip. He was a very driven person, a workaholic. Russ and Connie continued to talk about what she had done over the weekend, what was new with the kids, and other miscellaneous details. It took them about an hour to reach home.

As Russ brought in his luggage she busied herself with picking up toys and starting a load of wash. She was numb. Russ didn't seem to notice the awkwardness of her mood. She wondered if she was like this more often that she thought. When Russ went into his office to check his messages she quietly picked up the phone and called her doctor. She made an appointment for two days from today. Usually there is a longer waiting period to get an appointment but she had explained her urgency and the receptionist had felt bad for her. She hung up the phone, relieved that hopefully he could do something for her.

She had gone to pick up the kids from daycare soon after making her appointment and was glad for the distraction. With the kids at home there was no time to think about her panic attacks or her oncoming depression. There was dinner to be fixed and baths to be run. They all sat down to dinner as a family, but the little ones always seemed to control the dinner conversation, which was fine with her. She cleaned up after dinner, helped her oldest with his homework, read bedtime stories and put them down for the night. It was almost ten o'clock by the time she crawled into bed beside Russ, and they were both exhausted. Sleep came fast for Connie, a welcomed relief.

The kids woke bright and early as they always did. While Russ was still trying to get the cobwebs out of his head, Connie got up and began to fix breakfast. The routine of the nights and mornings was enough to keep her mind off her problems. She was even able to pretend to be in a good mood and joke around with the kids while they ate. She prepared lunch for her first grader and gathered diapers for her youngest one. Sometimes, on days when she didn't have to work, she would keep her baby at home with her. But today she packed him up to go to the sitter. She didn't even like being around herself, why in the world would she make her child spend the whole day with her?

She drove her kids to school and daycare and returned home to start cleaning. Though her daily life was far from exciting, it did help calm her. She felt safe at home, safer than being out driving around, and that worried her. Any normal person would probably rather be at home that out driving around, but Connie had always been a runner. She usually got bored being at home all day long. She would do projects around the house, go shopping, or go out to lunch with a friend. But lately, she had wanted to be alone. She seldom called her friends, and ventured out shopping only when it was necessary. It was getting colder now. That's what she blamed her seclusion on, the chill in the air outside. But deep in her heart she knew that wasn't

what kept her in at all. It was the fear. Sometimes on her day off she would go to the video store and rent three or four movies. She would wrap herself up in a blanket and watch movies all afternoon. If someone was looking for an escape, movies worked very well. Characters in movies almost always had more tragedy in their lives then she did.

She hadn't gone to the video store this time, because she spent yesterday driving to the airport. So, housework it was. The call came about noon. It was the doctor's office saying the doctor had gone home ill and wouldn't be in tomorrow, they needed to reschedule her appointment. It was as if the whole world had just fallen away. Connie's heart sank, she had put all her energy in the hope that when she saw the doctor tomorrow he would be able to help her. She maintained her composure while she was on the phone and rescheduled her appointment for the following week. But as she replaced the receiver she began to cry.

How was any sane person supposed to understand what goes on in the head of someone having panic attacks. It seems to be a totally irrational phenomena. Each day is a struggle. Some days are better that others. There are hundreds of thousands of people that suffer from some sort of mental disorder. What Connie didn't like was the stigma that was attached to the whole area. It isn't something she will talk about to many people. Actually, Russ and her sister are the only ones that even know she suffers from depression and anxiety attacks, and they don't really know the half of it. It is said that life is a challenge. Some people face more of a challenge in one day than others face in a lifetime.

World Wait For Me

Mary Head

The day outside is passing,
I sit and stare out into space.
I'm thinking of fond memories,
None of them can be replaced.
Just for one more day,
I wish I could be there.
But time won't give me that day,
God, it just doesn't seem fair.
The longer I sit here and think,
The more my heart will sink
For I know the world won't wait for me,
While I go back in time.

Work and Marriage

Mary Head

It was 4:30 a.m. Thursday morning. John pulled slowly into the driveway, turning his lights off before they shone through the bedroom window. He didn't want to risk waking Elizabeth. He had gone out for a drink with the guys from the office. One drink turned into several, and before he knew it, it was 4 in the morning.

He got out of his car as quietly as possible and made his way to the side door. He was in luck the door was unlocked. He quickly slipped off his shoes and undressed as he tip-toed down the hall. He thought he was home free until he stepped into their bedroom and Elizabeth began a talking.

"Where in the world have you been?" She hesitated just a minute before continuing, not waiting for an answer. "Don't bother. I probably won't believe you anyway. Your mother called at 3:30 this morning. They had to take your father to the hospital. The doctors say he had another stroke,

but this one looks far more serious that the ones before."

As she rolled over, he could see that she had been crying. "He'll be okay Lizzie. He's managed to pull through some pretty tough situations before."

"Sure, but I'm worried about him. He's your father; you should be worried too. But it isn't him I've stayed up all night thinking about. We are not okay. And I am getting very tired of pretending we are."

"Lizzie, please don't go into it right now. I'm jumping in the shower so that I can go to the hospital. Would you put some coffee on?"

She rolled out of bed. Like the dutiful housewife she was, she put on her robe and went into the kitchen to start the coffee. The kids would be up soon. She wondered how long she could continue to shelter them, to stay in this relationship, this sham of a marriage. How long could she protect her children. Ryan was nine now, and Sarah would soon be six. Once she went into first grade things would be easier.

The hot water ran through his hair and down his back as he stood there, his mind racing. "That was a close one." He knew no one would hear him. If it wasn't for Dad's stroke he would have had to deal with Elizabeth's anger. "I have to stop drinking so much," he told himself, not really believing that he would. What else is a person to do when he works fifty hours a week to support his family? He wished he could stay home with the kids. How much easier could someone's life be. It amazed him sometimes how Elizabeth was so unhappy. He gave her everything she needed. Everything she wanted she could buy. He never gave her a hard time about money. He hadn't ever hit her, or cheated on her. At least, not that she knew of. What more could a man do?

He jumped out of the shower, made a quick call to work to say he wouldn't be in. They understood. His father had had many mild strokes in the last year. She did say it was mild, didn't she? He quickly dressed in Dockers and a sweatshirt. Walking into the kitchen he grabbed a cup of coffee. One of those big insulated cups you take with you on your way to work so you'll be awake by the time you get there. "Where did you say my father was?"

"I didn't. You didn't ask. He's at St. Mary's. The room number is on the night stand."

He ran back to the bedroom, grabbed the pad off the night stand and headed for the door and shouted, "Going to the hospital, don't know how long I'll be."

As he shut the door, Elizabeth said, "Call and tell me what's going on." And then she mumbled under her breath, "Preferably before you hit the bar."

The kids barreled into the kitchen, asking what was for breakfast, and where was Daddy? How in the world could they think so highly of him? Hadn't they noticed that he was never around anymore? Elizabeth didn't want to upset the kids by telling them about Grandpa. She simply explained John's absence by an early start at the office. That was usual, and the kids wouldn't be suspicious. They ate their breakfast and scurried upstairs to get dressed.

As the kids jumped onto the school bus, Elizabeth closed the door. She hadn't heard from John yet, so she decided to call the hospital. Her mother-in-law answered the phone.

"No, they didn't know how bad Carl was yet, the doctors were still running tests. But he did seem to be completely out of it . . . Yes, John had showed up. He looks awfully tired, poor things, he works so hard to give you and the kids all the nice things you have . . . No, you don't need to make a special trip. John's here."

John's there. That echoed in her mind for a good fifteen minutes after she hung up the phone. She had forgotten what that was like, to have John here. She wished desperately that he would stop going out after work and spend more time at home with her and the kids. Where had it all gone wrong? How did it get this bad? And how in the world would they ever be able to rebuild their marriage?

At hospital John's mom went over and hugged him. "You look so tired honey. You really push yourself too hard. Are you and Lizzie fighting again?"

"No, Ma, we're doing fine. I've just put in a lot more hours at work the past couple of weeks than I would have liked to, that's all."

"Well, doesn't she understand how hard you work?"

"Yeah, Ma, she understands. It's just been a rough week." John was thinking, she understands I work hard, but she also knows I play hard. How could any son ever say that to his mother. There she was, sitting by my father's side, always supporting him, always with him. Why couldn't I have found someone like my mother to marry. Involuntarily, he shivered at the thought, but didn't notice.

He walked down the hall to make a call to work to see how things were going. "No, I'm still at the hospital. They don't know anything yet." He instructed them on the important paperwork that had to be handled that day and said he would check back in with them in the afternoon. He hung up the phone, picked it up again, and called home. When the phone rang once on the other end, he quickly hung it up. What was he going to say? "Hello, sweetheart, my Dad doesn't look so good? Let's forget about what happened this morning? How about if I come home for a quickie, so we can make up and be happy again?" Somehow he knew none of these lines would work. He had the distinct feeling that Lizzie was really mad this time. He sighed heavily and walked back to his father's hospital room.

Elizabeth sat at the kitchen table staring at the checkbook she was pretending to balance. She always tried to support him and be understanding when he worked late. They had discussed his dedication to his job on several occasions. He was trying to do the best he could so that she would be able to continue staying home and they could still live comfortably on a single paycheck. But suddenly, "comfortably" was defined by material things. It certainly wasn't comfortable lying awake at 3:30 wondering where your husband was. Was he in a ditch? Or in a hotel room with some girl? She had never before thought it possible for John to be cheating. But she was beginning to wonder.

She was at a loss. Even if she had the nerve to leave him, she couldn't do anything with his father in the hospital. And leaving wasn't really what she wanted to do. She wanted to make their relationship better. Maybe if she tried harder, just lavished him with love, he would want to come back. Maybe if she told him how she had been feeling, he would understand. Maybe, maybe, maybe. She was so sick of guessing what was becoming of her life.

"Go home and rest, Ma. I'll be here with Dad until you come back." As John helped her get her coat on and pushed her to the door, he stuck money in her had for a cab. He wished he could take her home, she'd been up all night. But with only one brother, who conveniently lived fifteen hundred miles away, it was hard to cover all the bases. He didn't want to leave Dad alone either.

John pulled a chair close to his dad's bed and sat down. "Mind if we have a little talk, Dad? I really need your advice." He wasn't so cold hearted that he would lay his problems on his father when the man lay in a hospital. But since his dad was still sleeping, John though it would be all right to talk out loud. "Dad, Lizzie's really upset with me this time. I don't really know when things started going wrong. All I know is that no there is a distance between us. Sometimes it feels as big as the Grand Canyon. I put all my time and energy into trying to be a success at my job, and she puts all her energy into Ryan and Sarah. She's really great with them. If they ever need anything, they go to her. It's like I'm not even in the picture anymore."

John's dad began to stir. He opened his eyes and it took a minute for him to realize where he was. He glanced in John's direction and gave a grin. It was a pathetic attempt to make light of where he found himself. He tried to speak, but no words came out.

John moved closer and said, "It's all right, Dad, I'm here with you. Ma just ran home to change clothes and try to sleep a little." The older man tried to sit up but retched in pain as he fell back against his pillow. "Just relax, Dad. Everything's fine." As John's dad began to slip back into unconsciousness John grabbed his hand. His dad gave a soft, quick squeeze before falling back asleep.

Staring off into space, John conjured up a picture of the time he sat by Elizabeth after Sarah was born. She had tried so hard to be strong, to have her naturally. But after thirty hours of labor the doctor had done a c-section. John had been sitting by her side, just like he was now with his dad, holding her hand when she woke up.

"Hello, sweetheart! We have a beautiful baby girl." His eyes had filled with tears. He had come close to losing Lizzie that time. That's when they had both decided not to have any more children. "We can adopt, honey, if you really want another one. But you're just too precious to me to put you through that again. I won't do it."

Lizzie had always been the strong one. Three months after Sarah and Lizzie came home from the hospital John had lost his job. "Don't worry," Elizabeth kept saying, "We're going to be fine."

When he had received his last promotion, he had come home to a candlelight dinner. Soft music in the background, a chilled bottle of champagne in the refrigerator, the whole nine yards.

And then there was the first time his father had gone into the hospital. When he was on the phone with his ma, Lizzie had known something was wrong. She was there the minute he hung up the phone, tears in her eyes, feeling his pain almost before he did.

John's dad moved in his hospital bed, bringing John out of his revere. He seemed to have only shifted, though, and was soon fast asleep again. Then the door opened and Dr. Barnett stepped inside. He had been their family doctor for as long as John could remember. He smiled at John and asked how Elizabeth and the kids were doing.

"So, tell me doc, how bad does it look?"

"It looks like your father will be fine. He'll needs lots of rest. Your mother, bless her heart, has been after him for years to eat right. Maybe it's time we filled you in on the seriousness of his situation."

As Dr. Barnett began to talk, John learned that his father had been diagnosed with diabetes and been put on a strict diet years ago. Obviously his dad had not followed the diet. John could not remember one time his father had steered away from fatty foods. John and the doctor talked for about fifteen minutes before the doctor had to continue on his rounds.

John gazed at his father. There lies a man struggling everyday with his health, but never once had he let on how serious it was. And poor ma, chasing him around and nagging him to take care of himself.

"Dad, you are so lucky to have Ma to watch out for you. I wish you'd tell me the secret of your happiness together."

John's dad squeezed his hand, and John jumped from the unexpected response. Dad seemed to be trying to say something, but it was obviously very painful to do so. John leaned over his father's bed and listened very carefully.

"Don't ever forget you love each other." With that said, his father eased back onto his pillow and closed his eyes again.

John sat there with tears streaming down his face. How could a concept so easy be so hard to follow? He waited until he was sure his voice would be steady and picked up the phone. As much as he tried to control his voice, when he spoke it was thick with emotion. "Elizabeth Anne, I love you!" He began to cry uncontrollably.

Without a second thought, as tears rolled down her own cheeks, Lizzie responded, "I'll be right there." After all, she loved John with all her heart. No one had ever said life was going to be easy, or that marriage would only be filled with happy times. "We'll just have to start trying harder," Lizzie said out loud as she pulled out of the driveway.

You Are So Far Away
Mary Head

I saw someone who reminded me of you
I was so stunned, I didn't know what to say.
Time hasn't made the memories fade,
They all came rushing back today.
You are so far away.

I wonder what could have been if I had stayed,
Why, after all this time,
    don't the memories fade?
You helped me get over a lot of pain
    in those days.
It seems we had so little time before I went away.
You are so far away.

I wonder if things would be different
    if I had stayed,
But there has to be a reason why
    God led me this way.
I try to understand why things
    happened this way,
Perhaps I've made a big mistake;
    maybe I should have stayed.
You are so far away.

Agenda
Jeff Hicks

I saw her,
yesterday.

I watched her,
today.

I'll talk to her,
tomorrow.

Doublespeak
Jeff Hicks

She loves me?
She loves me not?
Why would she?
Wouldn't she not?
Shall she should?
Why wouldn't she would?
Couldn't she?
Wouldn't she?
Shouldn't she could?

Katherine in Chicago at 4 a.m.
Jeff Hicks

Katherine sleeps,
contented in her car seat dream world.
Her hand holding a crown of daisies,
from the evening's events,
as her hair softly drapes her shoulders.

I drive,
taking us home.
The street lights,
come and go,
waving shadows past us.

Still she sleeps,
as the engine drones on.
And the lights flash by,
while I wonder,
what she is dreaming.

Phun whilst on Phenylalanine
Jeff Hicks

Going home and eating lawn furniture.
Art deco being better flavored,
than modernistic.
Selling sawdust to the stars
making them twinkle brighter.
Superbright high from the sap.
Going cold turkey
from being Hooked on Phonics.
Never gave a good buzz anyway.
At least not like lawn furniture . . .
Or tree sap.

A Discovery . . . of Sorts
Shirlene Holden

ignore me if i smile

in a time when real men
are a thing of extinction

i have made the
ultimate
archaeological find.

with teeth like pearls
and a tongue like velvet.

i can tell this is the
beginning of the end.

my joy overwhelms me
one so perfect . . . you
one so lucky . . . me.

Arizona
Shirlene Holden

Piercing
Pointed
Jagged
E
D
G
E
S

PUNCHING
through the powdered sky

Backdrop panoramic views
of pocked and pulpy cactus.

LOPSIDED
Shirlene Holden

I GIVE
I EXPLAIN
I BLEED
I SEPARATE
I LINGER - WITH HOPE

LOVE
Shirlene Holden

HE TAKES
HE EMBELLISHES
HE FROSTS
HE DETACHES
HE REPLACES - MOVES ON.

Stolen Love
Shirlene Holden

Hair
Matted
Steaming
Heavy with the
Humid Scent
of all that is

-Hot-
-Sensual-
-Lustful-

Skin
Wet with
Perspiration

-Soft-
-Slippery-
-Svelte-

Exhausted from
Overexertion.

Lace
Tattered
Torn
Fall at
the Hem.

You
Shirlene Holden

You encompass me
in all I see there you are.

Stars
sparkling
resembling spring rain
beading
on ebony skin
I feather at its implications.

Moon
translucent
rays shifting shape
horizontally arching
bowing . . . curving
toward
my centerpiece of joy
- you.

My heart and mind
cottony
cloudy
cluttered
with thoughts of you
all I possess . . . all I need
- you.

Ecstasy
Deanna Joppa

A chain smoker.
She was.
When things are depressing.
Sitting.
Making love to a cigarette.
Wondering.
What went wrong?
Sitting.
Thinking.
What happens if?
Where did it go?
Problems, fading as smoke hurls.
Up to heights unknown.

Depression.
Exhaustion.
Fading.
Thinking.
Loving things unreal . . .
in a world of realities.

Are You A Man?

Deontae Kazmere

Gunshots ringing in my ears
Little kids worried, eyes full of tears.
When will you learn to put down that gun?
Shooting, killing, and funerals aren't fun.
When you're walking down that alley
with that gun
in you hand, tell me do you really consider
yourself a man?
Or are you only doing this to give
yourself a name?
Being in jail or being killed
will be your only fame.
What will you do when
you're labeled a murderer in your town?
Tell me then, do you still want to be down
with this gang-banging and all?
Will your so-called friends
be there to catch your fall?
Tell me where is your "family" now?
Are they going to help you out?
Get up and get out before it's too late.
Life is too precious and time doesn't wait.

Freeway

Andrew Kornhaber

Shouting
through my eyes.
A life full of torment.

Golden Eagles on one side
Bucks on the other
Occasionally there's a brewer
in my dreams.

No one understands me
for what I really am.
Just trying to get by
from day to day-
These voices in my head
are screaming through me
trying to get to the world.

You conclude that I hate you,
But its they who despise us all.
I announce this to the world-
everyone hears, but
no one cares to listen.
Just shut me down in a cell,
I'm out of site and out of mind.
Leave me in the gutter,
you don't live here so it's
not your problem-
anymore.
I am in you all.

No one is totally free
of the voices in my head.
They care not who you are,
they'll take you just the same.
One false move and you are me.

Logic

Andrew Kornhaber

We speak the same language
I still can't understand you
Your speeches reach over my head
and leave me dazed
I don't see the point of my confusion

Why must I be lost
in order to learn?

I know I'm not alone
in this sea of faces-

I see other blank stares

too much chaos
to ask a question

not enough chaos
to gain my attention

What's the point?

No one knows what's being taught
Perhaps through osmosis
I'll pass that test.

Perhaps.

Are You Afraid of the Dark?

Rick Langheld

Are you afraid of the dark?
Not the absence of light,
but rather the darkness of the human soul.
The inner predator that exists inside all of us.
It feeds on our hate.
It breeds through our thoughts of anger.
It grows stronger with every act of violence
we become
witness to.

Are you afraid of the dark?
Its heavy breath grows faster
and harder until our blood
turns to acid
and our pulses become visible monsters
clawing their way
out of our necks and wrists.
Our emotions pulsate with fury,
sadness,
fear,
and death.

Are you afraid of the dark?
This dark entity has evolved
and is eating away at our
very beings,
Gnawing and chewing until the moment
when our emotions
explode.
You've surrendered and been rendered
a helpless lamb to
the dark and powerful idea of the freedom
that it seems
only apocalypse can bring now.

So,
now,
as I enter my tomb,
as I run the scalding water,
as the hot steam fills the room
as it has filled my heart,
as tears fill my eyes and flow
like blood down my cheeks,
as I lift my razor sharp salvation,
as I penetrate my black acid, evil-filled lifeline,
I ask you one final time . . .
. . . Are you afraid of the dark? . . .

. . . you should be

The Grump of Christmas Present

Milly Laux

Tinfoil garland and glowing trees,
Santa's pomp, polyester beard,
Madness and weirdness, far and near,
It's that 'crushed shopper' time of year.

Lighted "toilet brush" Christmas trees,
With branches all too accurate,
White sparkling plastic reindeer,
Not even Thanksgiving Day yet.

Dad's stressed out, mad, and complaining,
Of course, the over-limit charge?
"What? Another overdrawn check?"
Mom's, and kid's lists way too large.

Shiny molded synthetic balls,
Piped-in music, silk poinsettias,
Showy, styrofoam snow, now falls,
It's a nation-wide Christmas fetish!

Growing greed, mongo money use,
People, somewhere(?), I'm sure, starving,
Autos' ecology offense,
Companies, 'Jolly partying'.

Automated store window scenes,
Ancient characters, cheeks of rouge,
Lately, seems like everyone's been,
Calling me an arrogant "scrooge".

There's lunatic dining to glut,
And imbecile drinking too much.
Absurdly, "shopping 'til dropping!"
Yes, even my boss is a lush!

Tired tots cry on Santa's lap,
City's loss, waste, all lights lighted.
Why not stay home and take a nap?
A gift for me?

Oh I'm so excited!

The Pretenders

Milly Laux

sometimes, i just don't know who i am
but . . . I pretend

it's . . . no one's fault
it's . . . just the plight of the . . . adopted
we know . . .
things could be worse, much
but . . .
life does teach us to . . . pretend

often . . . it is ok
sometimes . . . smooth
but . . . still
i must . . . pretend

people ask
your . . . real . . . parents
your . . . real . . . grandparents
real . . .
i . . . don't . . . know . . .

my real home . . .
real . . .
where i . . . belong . . .
belong . . .

people say
who is your . . . sister
who do . . . you . . . look like
let's look at . . . our . . . family . . . trees

our . . . mine . . .
tree . . .
what's mine . . . where . . . why

is he your . . . real . . . brother
you're not . . . really . . . their . . . children
one of those . . . kids

life says
you're not . . . to look back . . . either

where am i . . . who
i am
where . . . i begin
i have to pretend

who are we
who's are we
who . . . am . . . i . . .
am i . . . i am . . .

not really . . . sure
no beginning . . .
are my children . . . my end

or . . . finally
my beginning . . .

could be worse, but . . .
i have to pretend

am i angry . . .
hurt . . .
more . . . the word

my choice
my rights
who am i
then
i am
just
a pretender

The Survivor

Milly Laux

Suddenly, it was over
The last battle
It was quiet, dead . . . quiet
Static, silence

It didn't matter who had commanded
No longer mattered
Competitors no longer cared
They'll never forget it . . . never

So quickly, it was over
No movement, dead . . . still
No more explosions
Nor compulsions

No more screeching
Only bleeding
The forever pain
Forever healing
No more killing
No bombs still swizzling

The slaughter was done
And beginning
The silence . . . dead silence
No living soldier will forget it

The living will live
Injured try, and try, to forgive
They all, forever, relive
So suddenly, over, it is
Is it
The survivors never forget

Dumb Soul

April McDonnell

You're thinking is so absurd
So blotted out and blurred
Maybe it's my brain that spins out of control.
You're so translucent; I didn't think
    you had a soul
Why is it your intelligence reminds me
    of cardboard?

Is there something in there crying
to be explored?
I don't understand how you could be so dumb
So overwhelmingly unfeeling and numb.

Lost Summer

April McDonnell

Sitting indian style on the carpet
The window's open
And the neighborhood sounds echo
So far away
Hammers, lawn mowers, little kids on bicycles
And the only sound in the room
A click, click, click of the lighter
As my mind drifts away from the blackness

Rain

April McDonnell

I usually refrain from going outside
(It's such a pitiful world)
But yesterday the wind was blowing just right
(And I had made up my mind)
When the air is queer
And it looks like rain is near
It's okay
I like it that way
It's okay
Yesterday was a strange day
Upon stepping outside
I felt my soul slide
Down to that secret place
And trivial was my face . . .
Now that it's gone
(It never lasts very long)
And I'm back sitting in my room
And it feels like I'll never again leave this doom.

Ugly Child

April McDonnell

She doesn't know about drugs
She's just a girl with hugs
For you and me 'cause we know
The girl is just a bit too slow.

We don't mind though, when we're alone
We just call that girl on the telephone
She comes over to play
She comes over another day.

The girl has a pretty face
Now I can see her every place
I got her picture in my pocket
I got one in my locket.

She's just a crazy cat
But it doesn't matter
As we listen to the soft rain pitter patter.

I hold this ugly child on my arm
And it always works like a charm
She thinks I love her, but it's not true
It would kill her if she only knew.

Wonderful Night
April McDonnell

Let's all have a wonderful night tonight
Let's all go fly through the sky
'Cause we're all going to be so high
Hey, your voice is drowning my head!
Can you please repeat what you just said?
Let's all lay low on our vacation
And enjoy our hallucination
Right now we're all like one
Staring straight into the sun
Let love float around free
Like sweet honey from a bee
Clouds transform into faces
We tangle our shoe laces
Nothing's real as we experience this pleasure
And when I'm sure it's beyond measure
My bubble pops
Like the world exploding
The bomb drops
And I come crashing down.

Stranglehold
Shawn McNeal

Looking through my minds eye
I see cloudy images . . .
indecision
no direction
clearly shown
fueled by you
relentless
decision
A little breathing room
is all I ask
as you reach again
your friend
your flask
I have nothing
left to give
you squeeze . . .
harder . . .
choking . . .
my will to live

Untitled
Shawn McNeal

The wheel's turn
    long after the wagon's break
life seems to be
    their greatest mistake
Your point fades off
    into the setting sun
I've heard it all too often
    nobody said life is fun.

Untitled
Shawn McNeal

As I'm walking
down this desolate road
there is plenty of time
for me to brood
over anything and everything
that comes to mind.
I find myself
stumbling down
this old familiar trail,

Is it just another nail
in the coffin of my life?
Hazy etchings . . .
Scattered dreams . . .
Can you tell me what it means?
I think I need to get away
from these recurring scenes.

"I don't know why I bother to smile,"
said the bloody feet
to the stained glass tile.
"Pain escapes with the crimson flow,
keep some inside to help you grow."
The sun goes down on your last breath.
Welcome, my child
to the realm of death.

The sky isn't snowing
    Is it?
The air is cold
I'm feeling old
The wind isn't blowing
    Is it?
Answer me, filthy whore
    Will you?
What does a soul cost?
I am so lost
Pleasure me, filthy whore
    Will you?

The moment when distorted reality
comes into perspective
when you're running with
the monkey's objective
The brilliant glow of neon light
whisks you well off into the night.
The masses slow and glare
unconsciously you stop and stare
The doctor shakes your hand
and slaps your ass
as you reach . . .
    onward . . .
your eighth . . .
tenth glass

Light trails . . .
    into darkness
imperceptible
tripping through blurred vision
blood drips from brain
shadows feel for soul
    tearing . . .
        shredding . . .
            BOLD . . .
Why's he looking at you like that?
    he can't know
cheshire smiles widen to eat
    sanity surely lost
Light trails . . .
    into distance
vast expanse of mortal eternity
rooster crowing through melting plastic
    toxic fumes
        primitive . . .
            naked . . .
                screaming into cold
murky depths of scented sex
    What was her name?
        no reply
    nervous pumping
    tar into withered lung
        insanity creeps beyond your sight
your shoes on fire, melting soul
rooster crowing into sunrise salvation

Inquisition

Eric Moniger

Questions; answers;
questions to be answered, millions.
Answers to the questions; none.
Thirst for knowledge; I am dehydrated.
My lips are dampened by bits of information.
Torturous of mind, of me.

Time being my rival, I race to beat it,
myself, others . . .
Confusion arises and a decision to be made.
I hesitate.
I think, No. I attempt thought.
The whirlwind across the lobes of my brain
makes incomprehension.
Motivation I have, yet no destination.
Where will I go?

In Memory of Leroy S. Hill "Casper"

Evonne Myers

Why doesn't anyone listen when I talk or teach?
Do you not want to hear the messages
I'm trying to preach?
Or is it because I'm telling the truth -
the truth that guns and gangs
don't mix with our youth?
Open up your mind and listen with your heart.
All of this violence is going
to keep us apart.
Stabbing each other and shooting in vain,
tell me, little children
are we going insane?
Take a look in the mirror and tell me
what do you see?
Are you the same child your mother or father
raised you to be?
Are you the same child that used to jump rope
or climb trees?
Are you the same child that pulled a trigger
and made another
fall to his knees?
Can you tell me when all this hatred will end?
Is it when death looks you in the face
and wipes away that grin?
Can you give me an answer before it's too late?
Or will someone else have
to become a victim of hate?

"More To Me"

Evonne Myers

There's more to me than my big brown eyes.
There's more to me that you realize.
It's more to me than the curve of my lips,
Than the way that I walk, or the swing in
my hips.
I'm not a sex object so don't treat me like one.
Don't put me in your fantasies
Leave me out of what you call "fun"
Physical beauty may be all that you see . . .
But yet, there still is more to me.

Reach Out to Me

Evonne Myers

Reach out to me
Give me your hand
You are my equal
Now take your stand
Come with me
And share my love
Ascend with me
To the world above
Share with me
Your mind and heart
I'll be your protector
We'll never have to part
We'll be inseparable
We'll be as one
You'll be my earth
I'll be your sun
Reach out to me

Fallen Angels

Andy Neill

When I was not in grade school learning about the saints and sinners, I spent my afternoons playing along the banks of Prince Pond. It may have only been a small retention pond for our neighborhood, but back then it was my whole world. One day as the sun was setting, an unusual bird appeared high over head in a tree. I was awe-struck and couldn't believe my eyes. This bird had a crown and a thick chain across its chest made of gold. The bird flew high into the air and plunged head first into the water, shattering the pond's smooth glass surface. I had seen an angel.

At dinner that evening I told my parents of my angelic encounter at the pond. They smiled with amusement and even suggested that the bird was my guardian angel in partial disguise. With my vision confirmed, I spent the rest of the summer looking for my guardian angel bird. I never saw him again.

The years went by; we moved away from the magic of Prince Pond, and my guardian angel bird became a faded memory. My earlier years of wildlife adventures on the banks of Prince Pond gave way to a formal pursuit of a biology degree in college. I was enrolled in a graduate course on the biology of higher vertebrates when I had an unexpected visit from my former guardian angel. It was late one evening in the ornithology lab, and I was studying for an exam on the common birds of North America. As I studied the distinguishing features of the stuffed specimens we needed to know for the test, I saw my angel. There lying on its back, life-less, and stuffed with cotton, next to many other birds of a similar fate was my angel. It had a crest of bluish gray feathers that stood erect on its head, giving the bird the appearance of wearing a crown. Across its white chest was a band of rusty brown feathers resembling a chain of gold unique to only the female of the species. I quickly thumbed through my worn field guide and discovered that my guardian angel was referred to scientifically as a Belted Kingfisher, whose feeding habits include plunging head first into water to capture fish.

The angel my parents thought I created so many years ago was in fact real. It was Aldo Leopold, a noted Midwestern naturalist, who wrote that education is learning to see one thing by going blind to another. As my angel fell that night into the specimen tray, I began to realize the true magic of my world on the banks of Prince Pond and the limitations of science education.

Chained Horses

Chris Patton

When I was a kid the world was much different
In such an exciting way.
I'd sit in my castle up in the trees
And fight dragons day after day.
Me and my knights would soar through the town
Riding our valiant steeds.
Until we were forced to wait as someone
Put their chain back on its lead.

And the simple dirt mound behind all the houses
Was certainly more than it seemed.
With bleachers and crowds and lights all around
We could hear how the people had screamed.
Then with a swing and a crack of the bat
The ball would go flying past third,
But the only thing sitting
    in our see-through stands
Was a cheerful and red little bird.

It's easy to think of all of the times
I was happy when I was a kid.
It's easy to remember all of the fun
I had doing the things I did.
But when I remember those times long past
It's hard for me to stay on track.
I can't help but stopping to think of today
And how much I want to go back.

Why???
Chris Patton

Isn't it funny how the world is so silly
Doing the things that it does?
Look and see that common sense
Just isn't what it once was
Like why do we use that same dirty basket
We did before our clothes were clean?
And why did they put braille on the keypad
Of my drive-up teller machine?
Why isn't phonetic spelled the way it sounds?
Why interstate highways in Hawaii?
Why do we drive on parkways
and park on driveways?
This logic just slips right on by me
If alcohol's illegal to drink while you drive
Why do you need a driver's license
to buy it in stores?
And if 7-11 is open 24-7
Why are there locks on the doors?
Why is it when you transport by car
It's called shipment for you to tow
But when the same thing is transported
by ship instead
They blatantly call it cargo?
So next time you're out and looking about
Pay attention to what you see
And you will find out why this crazy world
Just doesn't make sense to me

Gardens
Cassandra Salzman

Wilted petals fall
to the rocky ground below
and become the earth.

Innocence Lost
Cassandra Salzman

The most memorable thing
that has happened to me
isn't worth remembering.
Looking skyward with eyes of blue,
the curve of the world comes into view,
like 3D images of paper trees
with purple leaves breeding transparent fleas.
Our legs outstretched on florescent grass,
holding conversations with unseen friends,
holding hands until innocence ends.
With a kiss on the lips
and a breeze through our hair,
Looking into your invisible stare.
Silver teeth gleam through smiling eyes,
precious childhood lost to lies.

Untitled
Cassandra Salzman

"Everyday is Halloween,"
we reply in response to stupidity.
You try to put us down with your remarks,
but your hatred makes us stronger.
Your contradictions and hypocrisy killed
what you tried to force upon us.
Tell me, how does it feel to know your God
is dead, and we don't care?
Take your anger out on us,
hate us because you hate yourself.
Fear us because I continue to grow while you
fade to nothing in your self-induced
shell of conformity.
Don't smile when I talk of suicide,
I'm not yet ready to end my life.

You'll be the first to see me die, in the visions
I make you take into mind.
Trust in me, at least I'm real, your views on me
prove I make you feel.

Good-Bye

Dave Skrobaton

I'm writing this poem to let you know,
that when you leave me for good,
I'll be all alone.

I've always loved you right from the start,
from the moment I saw you,
you captured my heart.

You filled my life with a reason to exist,
I was taken in by your beauty and charm,
I could not resist.

I fell for you in the worst of ways,
not only was it my heart that you stole,
without ever knowing it you captured my soul.

You're afraid to try I understand,
believe in me again,
come, take my hand.

You tell me to move on and I'm trying to,
but you must understand,
I've spent my whole life trying to find you.

If your new man should stumble and fall,
please be patient, stick by him,
help him to stand tall.

For some of us are slow and not very bright,
it takes us more than once to get it right.

I love you more than you will ever know,
but my time is running out,
your getting ready to go.

You're going on without me,
you're making a new start,
save a place for a fool named Dave,
somewhere in your heart.

Ever This Day

Ann Sluis

Emily woke up early that morning. Her alarm clock went off like sirens, blaring that morning's weather report. "Partially cloudy with a slight chance of rain in the late afternoon with a high of 86°." She desperately wanted to press the damned snooze button, but she knew that this was much too important to just push aside.

She pulled back the covers, stretched her arms high above her head and then leaned over to give her husband a good morning kiss. It always surprised her that John could sleep through almost anything, but one kiss from her could wake him from the soundest sleep. "Good morning, dear. Time to wake up." As she said this, his eyes began to flutter. "Come on, my little sleepy-head. It's Alan and Brenda's big day and we have a *few* things to do."

All of a sudden, John sat up in bed as if a jolt of electricity had been shot up his spine, grabbed his loving wife, and kissed her squarely on the mouth. He could see the anxiety in her eyes. "Em, don't worry. Everything will be just fine." He knew how nervous she was to be back home after all those years. "I don't think that Mark will hold any resentment toward you for not visiting. You know, I still don't understand why you and your family never mentioned him before."

Emily just sighed; she wanted to explain things to her husband so desperately, but she knew that there was a time and place for everything. Just then, the telephone rang. "Damned hotel wake-up calls; they are never on time. Those people working at the front desk must be a load of slackers, I swear. Glad that I had the sense to set the alarm clock myself." Emily reached over, picked up the phone slightly and hung it up to stop its annoying clammer. "Well, I suppose I should take a quick shower before we go in order to wake me up. Won't take but twenty minutes."

She walked from the bed to the vanity on the other side of the room, snatched the necessary toiletries, and hurried into the bathroom. She was in and out in less than fifteen minutes. As she towel-dried her hair, John took the cue to start getting dressed himself. In the time it took his wife to dry her hair, put on her face, and slip into a pair of shorts and a teeshirt he was dressed, shaved, and ready to go. "Honey, did you look up that florist you mentioned? I know that you knew this area like the back of your hand, but it has been eight years since you have been back in town. That's a long time and you know how things can change." He looked over at his wife, who was finishing tying her tennis shoes.

She looked back at him, in a daze, then snapped out of it. "Oh, the florist. Um, sorry, I was just lost in thought. Yes, I looked it up last night. That place I told you about called Bennigan's isn't even listed. Boy, it has been a long time! I did see a place called Sweeney's, not far from here. That should suit us fine."

John came up behind her and placed his hands on her shoulder's in a feeble attempt to massage her worries away.

"Thanks, dear, I needed that." She leaned her head back, looked at him and smiled.

He could still see the exhaustion in her eyes from the long drive back home. John looked at his watch. "Well, I think that we should get going. We need to go to that florist before seeing Mark. Why do you want to be at Mark's by 7 a.m., I just don't know." John was often perplexed by his wife, but never questioned why she did most of the things that she did. His love for her outweighed her peculiarities.

John walked over to the desk, grabbed his wallet and keys, and escorted Emily out the door. As they got in the car, the sun began to rise over the horizon and gave life to the dark town. Emily was in utter shock to see her home town by sunlight for the first time in over eight years. The road they were on, 116th Street, had been a one lane country road, and now it was a two-lane divided highway. "My God, John! I can't believe how much this town has grown!" She peered out the window, shocked to see that a McDonald's and a Burger King had been erected in the place where Bennigan's Floral Gallery once stood. "Alan told me that the town had changed since I left, but I never expected this!"

John reached over and took his wife's hand and squeezed it in his. "So, where did you say this Sweeney's place was at?" As he asked her that, he could see that her mind was beginning to wander again: she tended to do that a lot. However, lately she seemed more distracted than usual. He could see that she was holding something back and that it was a thing that she desperately wanted to tell him, but he knew not to pressure her.

"Sorry, honey, the florist? Oh, it's just up this street." She continued to stare out the window in awe of how much her home town had changed. Emily spoke, almost to herself, "Never in a million years would I have expected Manatee to change so much, it's as if I never even lived here. Nothing looks familiar except for Ken's Meat Market, and even that has a new front."

John started to laugh under his breath slightly, "Em, you always seem to forget that Manatee no longer exists, remember? Alan told us back when he was at our wedding that the town was getting annexed by the Chicago city limits."

"Turn right at the next parking lot, the flower shop is in that complex." Emily said blankly as she pointed to the small strip mall to their right.

She disregarded what John had said about the town. She refused to acknowledge that Manatee, Illinois was no more. No matter what the town looked like or how much it had grown, or it's name for that matter, it would always be Manatee in her eyes.

They pulled into the parking lot just as the clerk was opening up the shop. As they walked in, the selection was so overwhelming to Emily that she almost forgot what her brother's favorite flower had been: lilies. As she was sniffing some roses near one of the displays, something caught her attention out of the corner of her eye. She turned around to see it and saw the most beautiful planter brimming over with more lilies than she could possibly count. "John, dear, I found exactly what I was looking for. It is absolutely perfect. I know that it is expensive, but I owe at least this much to my brother."

John walked over and nodded his approval at his wife's floral taste. He helped her carry it over to the front desk to pay for it. Behind the register was an older woman, holding on for dear life to a cup of coffee in order to keep her wits about her. Besides, who would expect a person to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at 6:45 in the morning without a little help?

The woman rang in the purchase. "Your total comes to forty-nine dollars and seventy-three cents." Emily reached into her wallet and pulled out her American Express card. As her card was being rung through for authorization, she couldn't help but reminisce about the days when credit card machines were few and far between in her home town. Obviously, times had definitely changed.

As John helped Emily into the car, he commented about how distant she had been lately. "Emily, is there something wrong? You have been so distracted these last few weeks, basically, ever since you got the invitation to Alan's wedding. Is everything all right?"

Emily just nodded. John decided to leave her be. He knew that if she had something important on her mind, she'd tell him eventually. They turned back on to the main road. Emily directed John to go down to the end and make a left on Fox Avenue. They drove down the road for about a mile and a half, and then she said, "Okay, honey. Make a left at the next stoplight onto St. Patrick's Lane and pull through the gate." John did as she said but did not know why she directed him there. They pulled onto a narrow paved driveway, and she had him stop a few car lengths from the old catholic church.

Before John could ask Emily, she got out of the car and walked over to the grass, stopping in front of a mass of weeds. She started pulling at them with her and hands in order to clear a place where she was to place the lilies she had just purchased. "Emily, won't we be late to see your brother. Why on earth are we stopping here?"

She looked up to her husband and started to sob. He looked past her and saw where she had been pulling the weeds from. Engraved in a slab of granite was the answer to his question. It read:

Markus Alan VanBuren
Beloved Son and Brother
Touched by the Hand of God on July 11, 1985

"Why didn't you tell me that he was dead? I'd hate to think that you have been keeping secrets from me." He looked over at his wife, who was sobbing uncontrollably at her brother's graveside.

She tried to fight back the tears and guilt and explain why she never told her husband about her brother's death. "John, there is a reason why I had you take me here at seven this morning. My mother had woken me up at that time in the morning to tell me that Mark had died and today would have been the twentieth anniversary of Mark's death. When I found out Alan was getting married today, I knew that it was the perfect time to tell you about everything that happened."

John just looked at his wife in astonishment as he listened to her explain her story. "Honey, I'm sorry that your brother died, but I still don't know why you never told me and why you have been so distant lately. Maybe you can bring light to all of this so that I can understand."

She continued, "I'm sorry that I kept this from

you, but I was ashamed of my brother's death and also felt for a long time that I was to blame. You see, Mark was born with a rare neuro-muscular disease. It had a degenerative effect on his muscles, so as he grew older, instead of growing new muscle tissue his body rebelled against it and destroyed it instead. It got so bad that he couldn't even remain sitting up, so my parents let him have a surgery that placed steel rods up and down his spine in order to freeze his posture in place."

John just sighed. He had no idea how sickly her brother had been, but still, he was unsure of why she was so ashamed of her brother and why she said that she felt that she was to blame for this death. "Honey, why did your brother bother you so that you could not bring yourself to tell me until now? We've been married over two years and you wait until just a month ago to even let on you had a brother, and now you're telling me that he is dead? Don't you know that you can tell me anything? I should hope that you trust me."

She looked up at her husband and realized how wrong it had been to hold things back from him until now, but she couldn't help it. She had to make sure that everything was OK before she told him everything. She was just too worried about what consequences it would bring that she decided it was best to wait until everything checked out. "I'm sorry. I never lost my trust in you. You see, there is a reason why I felt to blame about Mark's death. A week before he died, he and I were having a fight and I got mad at him and told him I wish that he was dead and stormed out of the room."

John couldn't help but chuckle out loud. "Honey, you shouldn't worry about something like that. Hell, if I had even a nickel for every time that I told my sister, Karen, that I wish that she was dead or never born at all, I'd be a very rich man today!"

Emily just looked at him with grave seriousness. "Well, I know a lot of people say things like that. But try to understand, I was only eight years old. How many kids do you know that said that and then the person they said that to actually did die? I know that I didn't cause his death now. However, for a long time I thought that I was the one that should have died, not Mark. It even got so bad that I had a fear that I would not live past 13 years old, because that was how old he was when he died. No matter what I do, even to this day, I still feel bad that the last major conversation I had with Mark was on such a bitter note. I wish that I could take it all back, but then it was too late: He died."

John thought that he finally understood why she kept her brother hidden for so long. He went to hold her, but she took a step back. It was then that he knew that there was something more important that she had to say. "Emily, what else is bothering you?"

She tried hard to hold back the tears that seemed to flow freely from her eyes by then. "I never told you of why I was ashamed of my brother. You see, there is a reason my brother was born with this disease. My brother's illness was caused by a flaw in my family's genetics. I wanted to tell you about him so desperately from the time I met you, but I didn't want you to feel bad for me. Also, I knew that you wanted to have children. I was afraid to tell you that there was a chance that any children we have may end up suffering the same fate as Mark. I saw how it tore my parents apart to see their son die, and that there was nothing that they could do. I didn't want to lose you because of a 'what-if' situation."

It was then that John saw why she was so afraid to tell him before, but he still reassured her of his undying love. "Em, you captured my heart like no one else ever could. I would never leave you because of something that might happen. Remember, I took you for better or worse, richer or poorer, and in sickness and health. I love you way too much to let you go because I was worried about something like that."

Just hearing that brought a sigh of relief to her. "John, you don't know how much better I feel hearing you say that." She walked up to him and took his hand in hers and kissed his wedding band. "I

have one final thing that I need to tell you. For several years after Mark's death, I kind of had a death wish partly from my guilt still thinking that I caused him to die. Several times I tried to take my life, but something always stopped me."

"I started to feel that I had a deep connection to him and that he was looking out for me and keeping me safe and out of harm's way. I came to realize that he was like a guardian angel to me. I started to pray the angel's prayer and ask him for guidance and for help in my life. Like it said, 'ever this day be at my side to light, to guard, to rule, to guide.' I hope that Mark will also guard his niece with as much protection as he gave me." She then placed John's hand on her stomach. "That's why I had to come here today. I needed to bring closure to my guilt and I also needed to . . . " she hesitated for a few seconds, trying to verbalize her thoughts. "I needed to thank him for answering my prayers."

John was awestruck and lost for word. He just stared at his wife as a sweep of emotion came over him. A sheepish grin of a schoolboy came over his lips as he started to rub at her tummy. He finally cleared his throat and blushed. "Em, we're going to have a baby?"

As Emily began to nod her head in answer to her husband's question, he swept her off her feet, kissed her lovingly and held her in his arms as he cradled her against his chest. "John, I know that I should have told you sooner, but when I found out in May that I was pregnant I was so afraid that our baby would suffer like Mark. I decided to go to a specialist in neurology to have tests run to make sure that out baby would be all right. He tested the baby's amniotic fluid for any enzymes that may be evident in neurological disorders. He told me that we had a healthy baby girl."

"It was around that same time that I got the invitation to Alan and Brenda's wedding. I knew that today would be the best time to get everything out in the open." She took his hand in hers and looked into his eyes. "I never wanted to keep anything from you. I just wanted to take as many precautions as possible to make sure that our baby is happy and healthy." John put his expectant wife back on her feet and continued to hug her. He was ecstatic, but still a bit weary that his wife dealt with this without his help. "Sugar, I wish that you would have told me sooner. I would have liked to have been there for you through all of this. I know that you had to do it this way for your own peace of mind, but I would like it if you let me know if you ever have anything bother you like this."

Emily knew that she was wrong to keep her husband in the dark for so long. "I love you. Please don't be angry with me about this."

He couldn't help but forgive his wife. He pulled back and couldn't be angry with her just by looking into her eyes. He loved her too much to let this stand in their way of happiness. He looked at his watch. "My God, we need to get those flowers planted, we still need to get back and get ready for the wedding. Besides, we have big news to announce."

John released his embrace and started to finish clearing enough room to plant the lilies. As John started to pull the remaining weeds from the ground, Emily ran back to the car to get the planter and reached under her seat and got a plaque she had hidden beneath it. As John arranged the flowers around the grave, she placed the marker at the base of the headstone. "I had this made up for him, as a memorial in thanks for his love." She kept the message hidden under her hand and refused to let him read it. "I'll tell you what it says in the car."

As they finished placing the last few flowers, John placed his arms around Emily, picked her up, and carried to the car. As they drove out of the cemetery, John asked her what she had placed on the memorial. "John, I feel very strongly that Mark watches over us. I think that it would only be fitting that his niece be named Margaret in his memory. I had the plaque made to show my appreciation for his guidance and love. Like the line, 'ever this day' of the guardian angel prayer, he will guard and watch over our family from this day

forth." She told him that she had the prayer to one's guardian angel engraved on the plaque, and it reads like this:

Angel of God my guardian dear,
To whom God's love commits me here
Ever this day be at my side
To light, to guard, to rule, to guide.

A Time to Remember

Tim Spidle

As I awoke that Tuesday morning of August 28, 1990, it seemed like any other day. How was I to know that, later that day, my life, would be changed forever. Listening to the radio as I was fulfilling my various duties at work, I heard of a tornado touching down in Plainfield, my place of residence. A cold chill ran down my spine as I mentally traced the path of the storm. The storm route ran directly through my subdivision! As I crawled home on the expressway, my mind was racing. Where were my wife and my two children, Courtney, age two, and Nathaniel, age six months? Were they safe from the wrath of the storm? What happened to our house? Was our neighborhood still there?

I arrived in Plainfield approximately 5 p.m. It had taken me three hours to return from my work, a normal 30 minute commute. The police had sealed off the town. I was allowed to proceed only after proving that I lived in the subdivision. I drove as far as I could, but had to abandon my car because of fallen debris and power lines. Walking westbound, I could see the east end of my house. The house looked to be intact. Could it be that my house was spared the fury of this great storm? Nearing my house, my exaltation was short lived. Although the east end of the house remained intact, that was all that remained of the structure after the tornado had blown through. With all communication systems interrupted, all I could do was wait to hear from my wife. Time passed slowly. As I was sifting through the rubble of what was once my house, I was interrupted by a tiny voice from behind me. The voice said, "Daddy, our house broken." The voice belonged to my daughter, who had arrived with my son, wife, and her parents. At that moment, knowing that my family was safe seemed to make all the devastation irrelevant.

The entire community banded together to help with the clean-up process. Having this common experience seemed to bond us together. Our immediate neighbors continued to support each other throughout the entire clean-up process, which lasted approximately ten days.

Then the real decisions needed to be made. Where were we going to stay while our house was being rebuilt? Was the insurance going to cover our losses? Do we build on the existing property or will the stress of the memories be too much to handle? What kind of house do we build? Who is going to build it? Just when we thought our lives were getting started, we were taken backward by a natural disaster.

The next ten months were filled with emotional decisions. Every decision was magnified by the impact of the experience. Every waking moment seemed to revolve around finishing the new house and getting my life started again. I felt inadequate knowing I wasn't providing for my family the way I felt I needed to. The weight of the world rested squarely on my shoulders. However, my wife was very supportive in this time, and our relationship prospered. Throughout the hardship of rebuilding our lives, I was shown that there is no stronger bond than between a husband and wife. The house finished, we moved in to resume our lives.

I was very fortunate to survive this whole ordeal. Although all my physical possessions had been eliminated, I gained knowledge and strength from my experience. I learned that no physical possessions last forever, but an emotional bond is timeless and much more satisfying. I believe the tornado improved my life forever.

Mirror, Mirror
Preface
Gale Tolf

I liken my poems to a mirror held up to my heart, mind and soul. It's a reflection of where I am- a way of expressing myself more finely than writing an autobiography. My verse is a catharsis of the dragons from my babbling id- angels and demons who haunt me till, like vampires, they are dragged up from the collective unconscious and exposed to the light of reality- leaving alchemical gold on a piece of paper.

The heroine and protagonist of the poems is the Goddess- who is love. "The Goddess is love and she who abides in love, abides in the Goddess and the Goddess in her." Love is the most powerful force in the universe, our stargate to heaven and Eden on earth. The lack of love is hell.

Accept, dear reader, this book of poems humbly offered. I tried, when writing them, to be an Amazon warrior, shielded with truth and fighting for love.

The myriad images of my inner and outer adventures this last year come out in rainbow colors as well as the dark blackness of storm-tossed nights. My grief and suffering has been part of the human condition, as well as the transcendental joy that comes from being akin to the universe when cradled in the image of the Goddess Love. Let you, my friend, be the judge, to see if the Goddess is alive in the poems.

Blue
Gale Tolf

In your time learned women were
    called bluestockings
And I remember your many shades
    of prussian and cobalt
Woven throughout the pattern of my life's loom
The carefree, happy powder blue
    of the childhood dolls
And ballerina tutu and toys you gave me
And talks in your summer garden with iced tea
Your stalwart navy encouraging me in school
I remember festive neon blue
    in California visits
Where we shared a menage a trois
    with the passionate Pacific
And the turquoise bluebird of happiness
    I clung to desperately
When I wanted to die from a broken heart
What fickle fate cut your destiny
    taking all your myriad hue?
What use the other rainbow colors
    when blue came from you?

The Death of Arthur Tolf
Gale Tolf

It came first in a word
Spoken only through robins and bluejays
Sparrows, crows, hummingbirds and cardinals
Who gathered about the feeder waiting
Calling with their forest voices to have him
Come out and have him give them
    seeds and bread
Bird calls falling on deaf ears
As the man inside was inert, unmoving
Free from physical pain in his old body
Yet his shining white, unfettered soul-
Who loved noisy Siamese cats, stray dogs,
crying babies, gangling teen age girls,
Chopin, quiet moments reading the Bible,
A sermon at the synagogue and Catholic mass,
And, most of all, his wife,
Soared to the up, up, up of heaven
To be welcomed to the bosom of sweet Jesus

In the Bitter Autumn Chill

Gale Tolf

In the bitter autumn chill the capricious wind
Tosses vermillion leaves about, scurrying-
A theatrical end to the growing season
And your soul, like nature's grain, is harvested
What's left of you now without earthly spirit?
The woman we all loved rose
    to heaven with wings
Met by saints and choirs of angels
Seraphim singing joy and adulation
The music of the spheres at the gate of heaven
I see the naked fall trees loosing painted leaves
The earthly drama of birth, life and death
Enacted for millenniums since Adam and Eve
Your afterlife reborn with Christ as I grieve
I miss you for your character,
    gentle grace and empathy
And how you lived life and faced death
    with stalwart Christianity
You loved so many, so much,
    the whole time you were living
That Jesus wanted you to live
    in Paradise for being so giving

Song of the Mentally Ill Artist

Gale Tolf

Your muscles calloused hands
Which could wrench free human forms
From white marble like Michelangelo
Pries my mind open chipping
    away at my lunacy
Chipping chipping chipping
    with masculine drive
Exposing my raw reality no longer encased
In a safe government sponsored home
Whose counselors speak in hushed voices
I'm not thought of anything except
"The manic depressive" or "The narcissist"
As I baptize my pain with raw guts in paint
Hearing the whispers,
    "Soooo- this is art therapy?"
Winged victory without feathers
Two artists standing in truth
My Pygmalian, kiss me,
    a cold stone from earth's bowels!
Breathe life to this sculpture you have chiseled
With brutal honesty, pregnant with art
Send your Catholic demons to hell in the abyss
Let me live out my mythology,
    create me with a kiss!

Virginia's Cats

Gale Tolf

A big fat chunk of a cat bamboozles over
To Virginia and plops on her lap
While a blue-eyed brown beauty jumps
To a table and bats her eyes - flirting-
This is their MAMA and they are
The lord and lady of the manor
Purring, backs arched, waiting to be petted
A snide hiss at the friendly black dog
These cats have tails to tell
Yet they confide only to their keeper
Late afternoon descends with a scirocco breeze
On the shadowed west facing porch
As they both curl up like two angels in fur
Hoodwinking oxygen- life breath-
Giving back life to their mistress
With all the snobbery of visiting royalty.

Wordeater 97 Student Jury:
Nicolle Byrnside
Jeff Hicks
Bob Loewe
Gale Tolf

Awards
Cover Design ($20.00)
John Benjamin

Prose ($5.00)
Wayne Berscheid
Wayne Ceranek
Colleen Fitzpatrick
Mary Head
Ann Sluis

Poetry ($5.00)
Erica Gallagher
Lola Gish
April McDonnell
Shawn McNeal
Evonne Myers

John Stobart is solely responsible for the awards.

Submission Deadlines
Manuscript and cover designs
must be submitted to:
John Stobart, Room C-1069

by

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December 10, 1997 - Wordeater 100

This issue contains selections from students, faculty, alumni and friends of Joliet Junior College. Only current students are eligible for awards.

WORDEATER 97

read me.